

# **Ending Isolation in Southeast Ferguson: Insights from Residents and Community Members**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The killing of Michael Brown in August 2014 brought national and international attention to the city of Ferguson, Missouri and starkly revealed the racial disparities that had persisted in that city for decades. This report aims to turn attention to the households living in Southeast Ferguson, the isolated corner of the city where Michael Brown was killed. Any successful and durable response to the social inequities revealed in August 2014 must include a strategy to improve the quality of life and open paths to opportunity for the residents of the almost 1,500 apartments in the Canfield Green Apartments, Northwinds Apartments, Oakmont Townhomes, Park Ridge Apartments, and Versailles Apartments and the neighboring clusters of single-family homes.

**Project Description.** The goal of this community assessment is to better understand the current context for the individuals and families living in the target area of southeast Ferguson. In addition to exploring current conditions, we sought insights on the future of the community, in particular perceptions about the idea of promoting a mixed-income transformation of the properties. Over a period of four months, a team of Urban Strategies and Center for the Study of Social Policy staff interviewed 68 residents and 39 community and institutional stakeholders. This report was also informed by stakeholder meetings and resident discussions prior to these most recent interviews. Taken together, this input from residents and community stakeholders shaped the report's recommendations, which will be shared with the larger community, city officials, stakeholders and residents living and working in Southeast Ferguson. Ongoing conversations with residents will solicit input and ideas from an increasing number of community members.

### Key Findings

#### **Isolation: Dynamics of the target area and broader community**

Overall, respondents report having very little sense of connection and belonging to the broader area; this sense of isolation was also acknowledged by community stakeholders. Additionally, there is a shared sense of a stark socioeconomic disparity between southeast Ferguson and other parts of the city. In fact, the target area is, in many ways, more demographically similar to Dellwood to the north and Jennings to the south than to the rest of Ferguson.

The isolation of the Southeast Ferguson target area is experienced by residents and witnessed by stakeholders on a variety of levels:

- **Economic disparity:** Residents perceive the area as high-poverty, and there exists an acute sense of economic inequality between the target area and other parts of Ferguson, particularly “Old Ferguson”.
- **Less investment, fewer resources:** Both residents and stakeholder interviewees described the area as having fewer employment opportunities, fewer amenities, and fewer businesses than other parts of the city. Perceptions exist among stakeholders that the Southeast Ferguson area does not receive necessary, or equal, attention from political or city leadership.
- **Physical neglect:** Both resident and community stakeholders we interviewed told us that the properties and target area are neglected and are consequently deteriorating, a point that is underscored when examining the upkeep of wealthier parts of the city.
- **Youth challenges:** The target area is part of the Riverview Gardens School District, which is currently unaccredited. Youth also face other challenges along the lines of available amenities or opportunities for activities. While there are many youth-oriented programs and activities in Ferguson, the youth that live in the target area have limited access to these opportunities due to proximity and inadequate transportation options.

#### **Resident and stakeholder perspectives on life in the target area**

- **Physical conditions:** Residents from each of the housing areas had both positive and negative comments about the physical conditions of their housing development. This suggests that residents have differing expectations, housing market experiences, and points of comparison and may see the very same housing reality in different ways.
- **Social relations:** Overall, residents had generally positive feelings about their neighbors, with an undercurrent of concern about the disruptive behavior of a subset of residents, particularly younger families and youth. Residents reported mostly limited interaction with neighbors from other housing developments and tended to have a negative perception about the other developments.
- **Economic well-being:** Residents of the target area are among the most economically deprived in the region. At least half of our sample reported being unemployed or underemployed.
- **Youth experiences:** There are too few constructive activities to engage the youth of the community, and youth experience constant harassment by the police.

#### **Resident needs, local resources, critical gaps**

- **Emergency needs:** The most accessible emergency resources for residents of the target area are provided by Better Family Life. Some of the community stakeholders suggested that better coordination of the emergency resources available from various sources, including food and utility assistance, would be a key area of improvement.

- **Stores and basic amenities:** Residents expressed the need for more stores in their community to meet their basic needs. These would include grocery stores, restaurants, retail stores and commercial outlets.
- **Employment:** Respondents reported an overall lack of job opportunities in the community and described a need for more job training and referral services.
- **Youth:**
  - While some of the resident respondents expressed concerns about the quality of the local school, most were quite positive. In contrast, community stakeholders we interviewed had strong criticisms of the local school.
  - Residents called for more youth programming to support them in various areas, including after-school activities and employment opportunities.
  - Many residents and community stakeholders agreed that a designated community space, such as a community center, is needed to provide a safe location for a variety of services and resources to be offered.
- **Transportation:** A main challenge emphasized by residents and stakeholders is inadequate public transportation for residents in the area.
- **Policing:** Residents of the target area reported that there is still a negative relationship with the Ferguson police. Several residents suggested that the police should shift to more of a community policing approach and spend more time out of their cars interacting with residents and building relationships, rather than patrolling from within their cars.

### **Perspectives on ending isolation through mixed-income transformation**

There was a wide range of responses on mixed-income transformation, from very positive to strongly negative, but overall the positive comments outnumbered the negative comments.

- Anticipated positives included stronger social networks, increased opportunities to interact with neighbors, a stronger sense of community, a culture and behavior shift and more opportunities for role models for youth and increased exposure to different lifestyles and careers.
- Anticipated negatives included conflicts that could emerge from living in a diverse community, including jealousy, prejudice, racial tensions, tensions over community power and influence, frictions over differing norms and expectations, a general fear of changing community culture and norms, and concerns about gentrification and displacement.

### **Recommendations for Action and Further Inquiry**

Overall, respondents report having very little sense of connection and belonging to the broader area. They describe a persistent feeling of geographic, economic and social isolation. This portrayal of life in Southeast Ferguson emerged from residents and other community stakeholders alike; a stark socioeconomic disparity between Southeast Ferguson and other parts of the city and region was revealed in interviewee responses.

The following recommendations are aimed at addressing the various forms of social and economic isolation experienced by Southeast Ferguson residents:

### **1) Develop a New Strategy for Delivering Services in Southeast Ferguson**

#### Promote more widespread and effective use of existing services

*Information dissemination:* Create a deliberate strategy to better inform individuals and families of resources and supports available to them. This strategy could include multiple ways for service providers to communicate with Southeast Ferguson residents more completely and intentionally, ranging from making information available where individuals and families are likely to be (such as in schools, or posting information in local businesses), to more actively using Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

*Better Access for Residents through Service Coordination and Performance Tracking:* To help make services more accessible and coordinated for residents, steps can be taken to better link current services, organize them around an individual or family's needs and thus yield more effective service delivery. As part of service coordination, we recommend consideration of a "case coordination" system for families and individuals receiving supportive services. In addition, a performance measurement system should be developed as a way to further refine the appropriate interventions and programs and ensure that services are addressing residents' needs. Organizations leading change efforts might consider the "collective impact" model of organizational collaboration that is now being used to strong effect in many cities, as well as the tools of Results-Based Accountability, which can help diverse providers work well together toward common well-being outcomes for children, youth, families and other residents.

#### A resource for residents: Community Empowerment Center

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis will be building a Community Empowerment Center on the site of the former Quik-Trip shop on West Florissant. The Urban League plans to invite several partners to share the space, including Provident Counseling, Better Family Life, University of Missouri Extension, and Home State Health. The Salvation Army Midland Division has plans to add a second story to the Community Empowerment Center. If the right set of partners provide services out of the space, a variety of challenges that Southeast Ferguson residents face could be addressed in a one-stop-shop fashion, including financial empowerment, employment, education, enhancing Urban League's Save our Sons program, enhancing Salvation Army's Pathways of Hope program, providing after-school support and training for youth, providing space for community members to meet, and ultimately creating a safe space for youth. Other, currently established, organizations that provide similar services as the future Urban League Community Empowerment Center include the Center for Social Empowerment and Justice and Better Family Life, and their efforts can be better coordinated.

### Leverage and coordinate emerging local and regional opportunities

Part of a new social service model for Southeast Ferguson would include tapping into new opportunities and partnerships in larger Ferguson and St. Louis. Leveraging new opportunities in the region would bring more resources in to Ferguson as well as help connect Southeast Ferguson to initiatives happening in other parts of Ferguson and St. Louis.

Two examples include:

*The St. Louis Promise Zone:* The promise zone designation allows communities to work directly with federal, state, and local agencies in eliminating red tape and better aligning resources in order to improve quality of life. The designation has a 10-year duration and all designated sites will have priority access to federal investments as well as technical assistance provision. We feel that this designation will be a valuable resource to further local efforts.

*Wyman Center: Local implementation of Youth Thrive™ approach:* Youth Thrive™ is a successful national approach of advancing adolescent health and well-being by supporting the whole child, including trauma-informed approaches. The Wyman Center has been implementing Youth Thrive™ training and supports in the St. Louis region and is interested in expanding and targeting its efforts in the Ferguson area. Organizations that Wyman could collaborate with to expand its emerging wrap-around model include The Children's Services Coalition and local universities in the region – St. Louis University, University of Missouri St. Louis and Washington University in St. Louis.

## **2) Community Engagement, Outreach and Youth Organizing to Address Isolation**

### Promote strong connections within and among developments

There is currently little organization among residents within the developments or among development and no tenant groups exist in the target area. There are strong social networks among some residents which could serve as building blocks for better organization. Residents who have lived in the area could be galvanized to form the basis of a tenant organization or network. Challenges to anticipate are the high transiency rate, strong differences of perspective and opinion among residents and the physical and psychological barriers between the developments.

### Promote broader integration beyond the housing developments

Strategies to promote the stronger integration of target area residents into the broader community should include connecting residents to resources within walking distance as well as determining how best to connect them to opportunities in the surrounding areas of Ferguson, Jennings, Dellwood and other local communities. Specific areas of focus

include collaboration between community organizations and property management, and increased transportation access.

### Focus on Youth Development and Youth Organizing

Young people in the target area are isolated physically, socially, economically, and politically from the rest of Ferguson and other parts of the region. We recommend that agencies serving young people in Southeast Ferguson create the space and forums for young people to express what their needs are and be key actors and agents of change in designing system-level solutions for those needs. One approach in creating this space for young people is to learn from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative, a successful national initiative aimed at assisting young people successfully age out of foster care. Although the Jim Casey Initiative is geared toward foster care youth specifically, the principles and processes that it has used to bring young people together, empower them to take action and build leadership skills could be adapted to efforts in Southeast Ferguson. Efforts to engage and empower young people will be strongest if they are part of a well-coordinated effort among existing youth serving agencies to develop a coherent youth development agenda in Ferguson, and particularly in Southeast Ferguson.

### **3) Help Promote a Shift toward More Community-Engaged Policing**

Determine how best to leverage the opportunity of the new police chief to promote a continued shift in policing strategy toward more engagement through community policing. St. Louis County and St. Louis City Police Departments have both established policing strategies to better engage the community, and the Ferguson Police Department should look toward St. Louis County and St. Louis City Police Departments for lessons learned from these strategies to bolster their community-engaged policing efforts.

Community-engaged policing efforts should include training police to better engage residents as a way to lead to more positive police-community interactions, focusing on positive, proactive police interactions with youth. Additionally, the new permanent sector policing strategy will need to be assessed to evaluate its effectiveness and impact on fostering more positive relationships between residents and the Ferguson Police Department.

### **4) Housing: Leverage Positive Aspects of Mixed-Income Transformation while Confronting Legitimate Concerns**

As opportunities emerge to plan for a mixed-income transformation of the developments, it will be vital to acknowledge and address the wide range of concerns that were voiced by residents about the potential downsides of such an approach. Emerging best practices for dealing with the challenging social dynamics should be

introduced and discussed. Urban Strategies has deep experience in St. Louis and around the country in promoting resident engagement and building human capital in mixed-income developments. The National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities at Case Western Reserve University is an additional resource for identifying best practices and strategies in this area. There should be more exposure for residents through site visits and learning exchanges to examples of successful physical transformation and improved quality of life in existing St. Louis mixed-income developments. Given that the strongest concerns were raised among unemployed residents and residents of the more challenged developments, special effort should be made to engage those residents in discussions and planning through an inclusive visioning process that promotes relationship building and community engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

The killing of Michael Brown in August 2014 brought national and international attention to the city of Ferguson, Missouri and starkly revealed the racial disparities that had persisted in that city for decades. Canfield Drive, the winding road on which Brown was shot became the epicenter for an outpouring of local and national anger about the social conditions that African Americans endure in Ferguson as they do in many cities in the U.S. Though the local and national spotlight was on this street and on the social, economic and political challenges of the southeast corner of Ferguson in which Michael Brown's death occurred, very little meaningful attention has been paid to the lives and aspirations of the individuals and families living in the housing complexes for which Canfield Drive serves as the primary point of entry and exit.

This report focuses on the households living in the isolated housing complexes of Southeast Ferguson. Any successful and durable response to the social inequities revealed in August 2014 must include a strategy to improve the quality of life of residents there and open pathways to opportunity for the residents of the almost 1,500 apartments in the Canfield Green Apartments, Northwinds Apartments, Oakmont Townhomes, Park Ridge Apartments, and Versailles Apartments (see map below) and the neighboring clusters of single-family homes. Residents of this "target area" are predominantly African American and overwhelming poor or working poor, and due to their physical and social isolation, they remain mostly invisible to the city of Ferguson and the surrounding metropolitan area.



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Owner - Ellis St. Leads: A. Civic Non-Profit  
Developer/Property Manager - McCormack Baron Salazar  
Human and Social Capital Development - Urban Strategies, Inc.

This report is being written at a time when there is renewed attention to issues of racial inequality in America. Racial and economic segregation is increasing in our neighborhoods and schools, and mounting evidence about the detrimental effects of concentrated poverty is accompanied by new evidence about the benefits to young children of moving out of low-poverty communities. The city of Ferguson remains a compelling and instructive example of segregation and exclusion given the stark contrast between the stable, thriving areas of the city and the conditions in these housing complexes.

The report was produced by an alliance of three organizations that have joined forces to improve national practice and policy on the creation of successful mixed-income communities as a stable platform for families of all background to thrive. Urban Strategies, Inc., a national organization based in St. Louis, specializes in human capital building and community development, the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities based in Cleveland, Ohio, specializes in applied research, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, based in Washington, D.C., specializes in policy development and technical assistance to promote stronger futures for children and their families. Urban Strategies, Inc., has been in dialogue with local stakeholders since Michael Brown's death, and this report represents one step toward developing and implementing solutions for the isolated families of Ferguson.

**How the report was prepared.** This community assessment aimed to help better understand the current context for the individuals and families living in the housing complexes of Southeast Ferguson. In addition to exploring current conditions, we sought insights on the future of the community, in particular perceptions about the idea of promoting a mixed-income transformation of the properties. This assessment process included interviewing residents, property owners and property management staff, and other local stakeholders including school representatives, business owners, City of Ferguson leadership and staff, and members of the police department. Key topics explored in the interviews included:

- the assets, circumstances and aspirations of local residents
- existing resources and available services in the surrounding area
- perspectives on a strategy of promoting greater economic integration

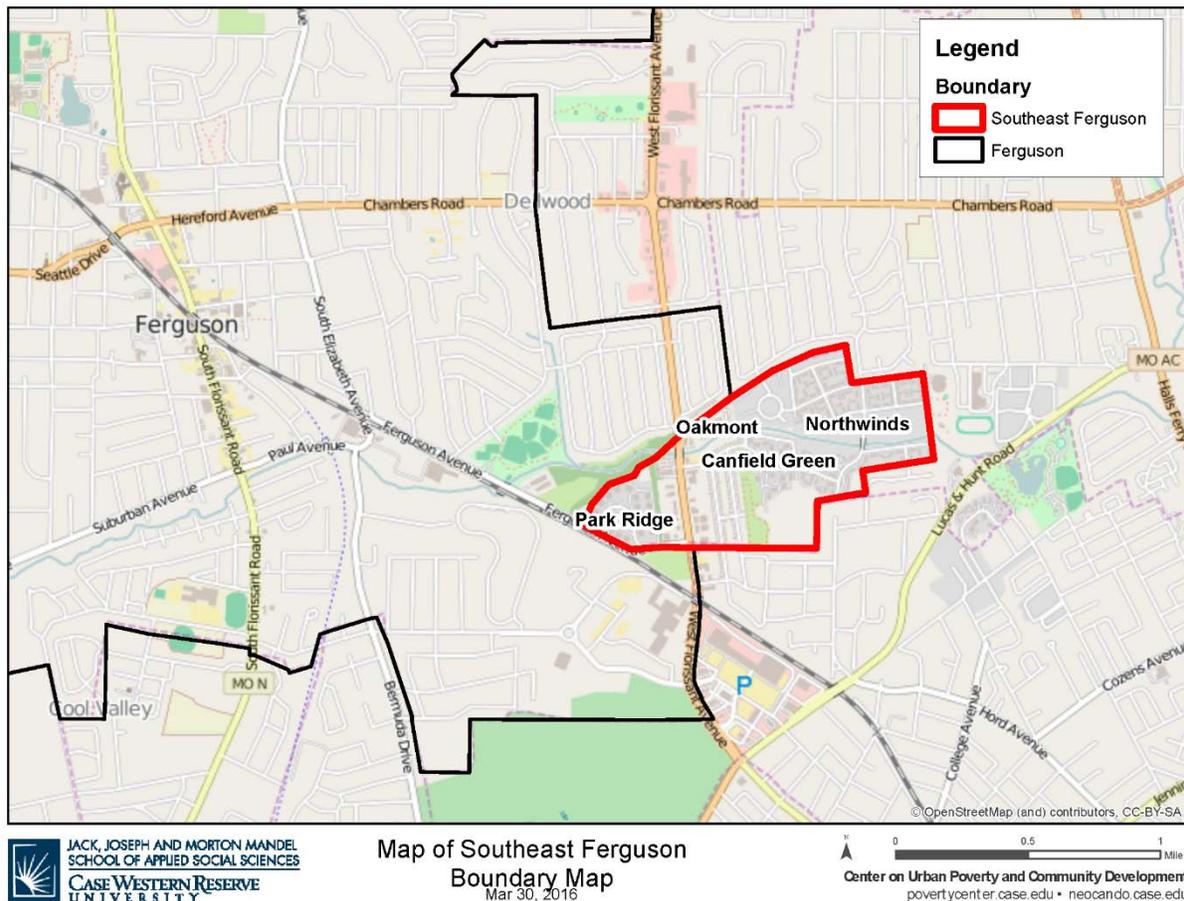
This report was also informed by stakeholder meetings and resident discussions prior to these most recent interviews. Taken together, this input from residents and community stakeholders shaped the report's recommendations, which will be shared with the larger community, city officials, stakeholders and residents living and working in Southeast Ferguson. Ongoing conversations with residents will solicit input and ideas from an increasing number of community members.

**Structure of this report.** The report is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief demographic description of the local context, with particular attention to the disparities between the housing developments of Southeast Ferguson and the surrounding

communities. Next, we describe the residents and community members who are the voices at the center of this report. Following that we share our key findings in four sections: 1) resident and stakeholder perspectives on life in this part of Ferguson, 2) the dynamics of this area and of broader community, 3) resident needs, local resources and critical gaps, and 4) perspectives on ending isolation through mixed-income transformation. We close with our recommendations for action and further inquiry.

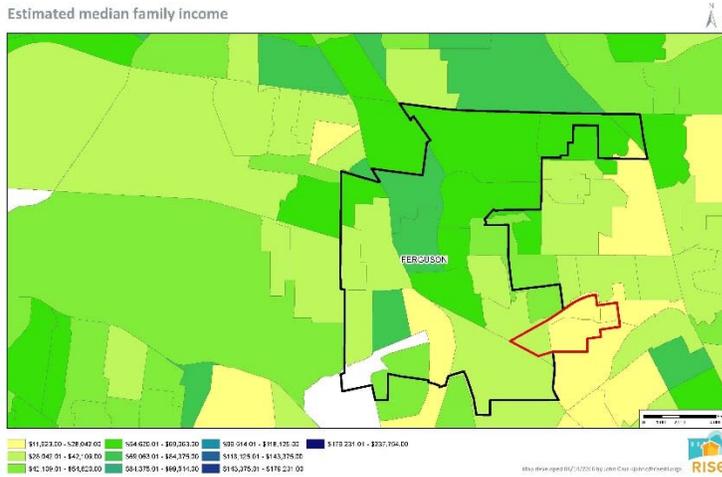
## LOCAL CONTEXT

As the map below indicates, the five housing complexes in the area that are the focus of this report are located within the southeast corner of the city of Ferguson. Four are clustered to the east of West Florissant Ave. and Park Ridge is separated from the others across the avenue to the west.

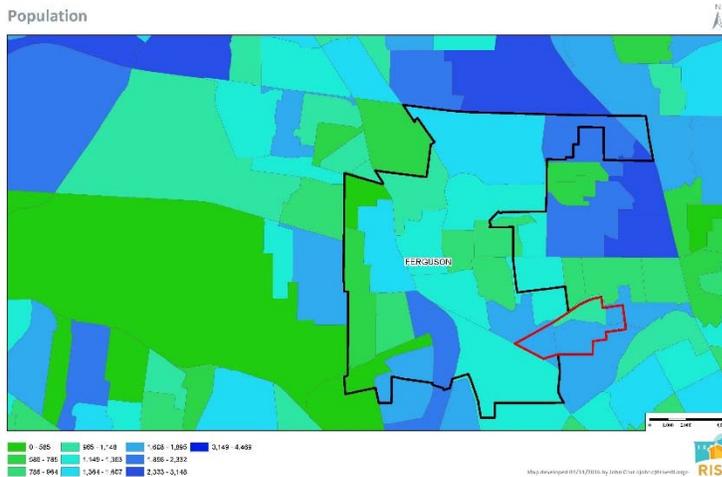


The following census data maps created by Rise Community Development in St. Louis paint a stark picture of the social and economic disparities between the target area and the other parts of the city of Ferguson. These maps also demonstrate that the target

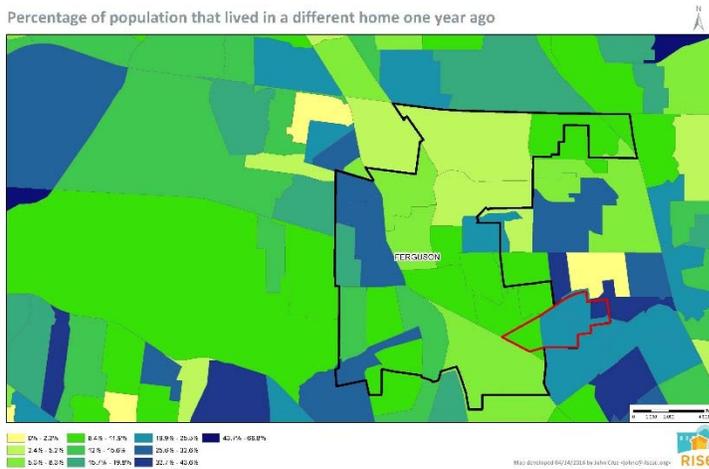
area in many instances is much more similar demographically to the contiguous areas that are not part of the city of Ferguson.



This income map shows that the target area has the lowest median family income in the city of Ferguson and is much more similar in terms of economic deprivation to the areas of the city of Jennings to the southeast.

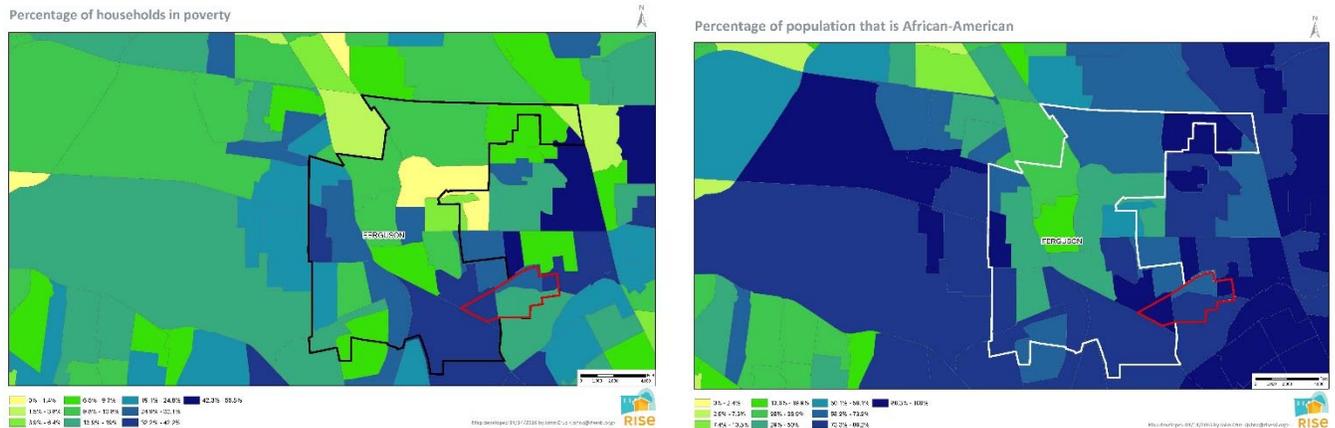


This map of population density shows that the target area is one of the most densely populated in the city of Ferguson.



This map of population mobility shows that the target area has a relatively highly transient population which, again, makes it more similar demographically to the areas to east than to the city of Ferguson.

The final two maps below, on poverty levels and racial composition, show that the target area has among the highest poverty levels in the area and the highest proportions of African-Americans, but on these indicators, is similar to some other areas of



Ferguson. All five maps also make apparent the more affluent and less diverse area of “old Ferguson” that runs diagonally from the northwest corner of the city. And, finally, while these maps confirm the racial and economic segregation and disparities that exist in Ferguson, they also indicate the spatial complexity of this disparity; there are not simply “two sides of the tracks.” In other words, there are no straightforward boundaries between the lower-income and more affluent parts of Ferguson. And the maps show that to fully understand the socioeconomic circumstances and dynamics within Ferguson, one must consider them in relation to the surrounding areas outside the municipal boundaries, which paint a larger picture of the region.

## VOICES OF THE COMMUNITY

Over a period of four months, a team of Urban Strategies and CSSP staff interviewed a convenience sample of over a hundred residents and local stakeholders. The resident respondents were recruited through notices, door-knocking and other community outreach. The stakeholders we interviewed were selected to represent an array of local organizations and institutions including government officials and staff, staff from local non-profits and community organizations, and employees at local businesses.

**Resident respondents.** Our resident sample includes 68 individuals from 54 different households living in four of the five housing developments and local single-family homes (we were not able to get access to the Versailles development, the smallest of the five developments). All of the resident respondents are African American, about two-thirds are female, and one-third are male. Thirty-eight of the residents have lived in the area for over three years, twenty-two have lived in the area between one and three years, and eight residents had moved into the area in the past year. Seventeen residents reported living alone, 13 live with one other adult in the household, and 37 have

children living in the household. Of those households with children, only seven households had at least one preschool-aged child, while 22 households reported having at least one middle-school or high-school aged child, and 15 reported having at least one out of school young adult living in the household. Eleven of the resident respondents were young people under 25 years old, two of whom were high school age and attend a Ferguson-Florissant District school.

At the time of the interviews, 12 respondents were working full time, 11 were working part-time, and 19 were currently unemployed and looking for work. Twenty-four reported being retired or disabled and therefore not looking for work. Of the 63 resident respondents who shared information on their educational attainment, 22 had completed some college courses or gotten a college degree. Of those 22, almost two-thirds were residents who lived in the Park Ridge development or the neighboring single-family homes. Among the resident respondents, twenty had earned their high school diploma or GED, while 19 had not finished high school. Twenty-four of the respondents reported having a voucher or other government assistance for housing.

Our conversations with residents were often quite rich and candid. Despite all the media attention on their community in the aftermath of Michael Brown's killing and then during the one-year anniversary of his death, many expressed that no one had taken time to really hear their opinions about life in their community.

Here is an illustrative sampling of some of the voices who shared their perspectives for this report (all names changed to protect confidentiality).

*Maybe if we had something to do there wouldn't be so much drama. The kids got nowhere to play.*

Beverly Johnson is a single mother living in one of the developments with her three children: a newborn, one in elementary school, and one who attends Ferguson Middle School. She originally moved to the area because she felt like the important resources she needs are close – Family Dollar, Target, Schnucks. She's lived in the area for a few years. Since the Michael Brown incident, she feels like the neighborhood has gone downhill. Her main concern is that there is little for youth to do.

*Spiritually speaking, the community needs help.*

Tamika Brown has lived in her complex for four years. She is disabled and retired, living alone. Living in the area, Tamika feels unsafe and as a result experiences stress and anxiety. She told us that if she had known what the area was like, she wouldn't have moved to this housing complex.

*No job, no money, no opportunities. People need help.*

Frank Williams has lived in the area for over 10 years, is currently retired and living in one of the developments. He told us he feels unsafe at times while out in the community, and he believes if there is some investment in the community – additional organizational resources, more job development – social issues would be solved.

*Always, a police officer will bother a black person.*

Alicia Davis is a 16-year old resident in the target area, living in a house with her four other siblings and parents. Her family uses a voucher to pay for the rent. She attends McCluer High School, part of the accredited Ferguson-Florissant school district. Somewhat more optimistic than other, older residents we spoke with, Alicia feels that her neighbors have largely positive relationships with each other. Her main challenge, like many other young people, is feeling like she is targeted by the police.

*Police are influenced by media. Stop harassing the young people.*

Elizabeth Jackson lives in one of the developments with her husband. They've lived there for almost two years, and she moved into the development after first looking to live in another development in the target area, who turned them down, and then attempting to get a unit in a second of the developments, who turned them away because they "made too much money." Neither Elizabeth nor her husband are currently working or looking for work.

**Local stakeholder respondents.** Our 39 non-resident respondents were a wide variety of local stakeholders, including business owners, City of Ferguson and St. Louis County staff and leadership, members of the Ferguson Police Department, property owners, management, and staff, leaders and staff at the local schools, and individuals working with a variety of community-based organizations, including service organizations, nonprofits, and churches. Nine of the stakeholders have been working in the Ferguson area for over three years, 12 have been working in the area for between one and three years, and just three reported working in the area for less than one year. Over half of the stakeholders we interviewed were African American, and over three quarters were male. Eleven of the respondents were owners or property management staff from one the housing complexes in the target area.

*We need to learn how to start valuing each other and learn to live in company of each other.*

Jeffrey Lang has worked in the Ferguson area for a community organization for around five years. Although he doesn't live in the target

area, he is very involved with the families that live in Southeast Ferguson. He asserts that Southeast Ferguson has been historically disconnected and neglected to more affluent parts of Ferguson due to systemized oppression of the black and low-income community.

*A lot of talent and passion that is untapped.*

Bill Jones has lived in Ferguson since 1997 and has been working in the area in the public sector for almost 10 years. He is also involved in youth advocacy in the City and feels strongly that one of Ferguson's greatest assets is the youth population, but that there needs to be a stronger system in place to support them.

*Residents made the community strong.*

Eddie Townsend has been a business owner in Southeast Ferguson for over 20 years. He has witnessed the change in the community from long-term residents to a more transient resident population, and with the population change came disinvestment in the area from both residents and the City. Eddie believes that the that Southeast Ferguson needs a leader and an advocate to help generate a sense of community ownership.

*Since the unrest we have held our own.*

Lisa Wilson has worked as an assistant property manager in Southeast Ferguson for almost five years. She feels strongly that one of the greatest strengths of the community is the older population who have stayed in the community since before the killing of Michael Brown. She believes that it is the transient population that is detrimental to the community's well-being.

## LIFE IN THE TARGET AREA: RESIDENT AND STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

In this next section we focus on resident and stakeholder perspectives about life within the target area, which includes the five housing complexes as well as some clusters of single-family homes.

### **Physical conditions**

Resident respondents were evenly split when asked about the physical condition of the complexes, about a third had mainly positive things to say, another third had mixed-opinions and a third had only negative things to say. Residents of Park Ridge and of homes in the neighborhood generally had relatively more negative things to say,

compared with residents of Canfield Green, Northwinds and Oakmont, but we heard positive and negative comments from residents from each of the housing areas. In part, this seems to suggest, as one would expect, that residents have differing expectations, housing market experiences, and points of comparison and may see the very same housing reality in different ways. This is a factor that will be important to keep in mind if there are efforts to organize residents around a common agenda.

Those who felt positively about their units described them as clean and well-kept and the buildings as quiet. Many residents seemed to be grateful to have housing that was generally good for the affordable amount they were paying. A typical description was: “the housing is not excellent, but fair.” In general, residents had a positive assessment of their relationship with the property management staff and found them responsive, though some disagreed strongly. This could also reflect different relationships with and treatment from the same property staff. There was great appreciation when the relationship is strong, like for this resident at Northwinds:

*Security comes through, talks to you. Staff talks to you, jokes with you. They keep you updated.*

The negative comments we heard focused on several areas: unresponsive maintenance, apartments in severe need of updating, thin apartment walls, poor indoor and outdoor lighting, deteriorating steps, trash and litter throughout the area, and roads in need of repair.

*I'd like a better quality complex, not the current dismal appearance. I'd like green landscaping.*

A few residents mentioned concerns with plumbing and raised questions about the quality of the faucet water, which in the post-Flint water crisis era is a significant red flag. The property management at Park Ridge was critiqued most often. The crumbling playground at Northwinds also stands out as a concern:

*That park is scraggily . . . My nieces and nephews play over there, they fall off the swings, there is a hole in the slide. We have complained about that before, property management said they would do something, but a year later they haven't done anything.*

The community stakeholders we interviewed shared a similar sense of the neglect and deterioration of the properties, as one city official put it: the “*streets and infrastructure are failing.*”

## Social relations

When asked about social relations at the developments, about half of the resident respondents had positive reflections, about a quarter had mixed perspectives and another quarter had only negative comments. The responses seemed to reflect differences in local social networks, varying lengths of duration of stay and personality type in terms of openness to engaging with others. The important takeaway seems to be that among respondents, for the most part, there were some very positive feelings about their neighbors and, for some, a strong sense of community. We should also note, however, that our respondent sample is made up of those who agreed to talk with us and therefore is likely skewed toward those residents who are more open to engaging with others.

Those with positive descriptions of the development described social relations as close and friendly, where you can have conversations with other residents and neighbors look out for one another. Some even used the term “close-knit” to describe the relationships.

*Everyone gets along fine, no problem at all.*

*We get along fine, they are beautiful people. I have no problems.*

*My mom knows a lot of people in the development and has relationships with her neighbors.*

The negative comments reflected a sense of social disconnection. In some cases, this was described as a personal preference for keeping to one’s self and avoiding interaction, in other cases it was a critique of the prevailing atmosphere. Some perceived that there is low participation in social events.

*Relations are pretty much so-so. You see [other residents], you keep it moving.*

*People avoid eye contact and even basic greetings.*

Several residents expressed that they would like to see better screening of new residents and more background checks.

Some of the neighbors living in the single-family homes near the developments perceived the developments to be quite problematic.

*They are the projects. People are living on top of each other, people are not following the rules of the property.*

Some development residents had concerns about the impact on the social climate of pervasive substance abuse.

*There is lots of drugs, alcohol. People are confused. They don't know where to go or where to turn.*

There is a sense among many that the social environment within the development has worsened after Michael Brown's killing. A major factor is the increase in the vacancy rate, particularly at Canfield Green where he was killed, where the rate dropped over the next year from 80 percent occupancy to 27 percent.

*It is now mostly vacant. People were afraid and moved out. Used to be a peaceful place.*

*The apartments used to be nice, The Canfield was cool at first, but after the uprising the tone changed. Seems a lot more ghetto than before. There is lots of drag racing and boarded-up buildings.*

There are those who had a more positive outlook on the impact of that event:

*The positive is that even after all that happened we are still here and our neighborhood seems still the same.*

Several of the community stakeholders expressed their admiration about how residents of the developments have endured the tumult after Michael Brown's killing and some agree that it has appeared to create some solidarity among some of the residents.

There is broad agreement among resident respondents that there are some strong social networks within the developments with "clusters of people" based on familial and friendship ties.

*There are lots of cliques. This group there, this group here.*

And it is clear that duration of residence matters, which is a challenging reality in such a generally transient community. The dynamic seems to be that those who have lived there for a while develop strong social connections but they are in the midst of neighbors who are constantly cycling in and out.

*At first I did not socialize with anyone. In later years I did. After my mother's death, the neighbors would come by or call to check on me.*

While relations within each development are characterized by some strong social ties, residents reported mostly limited interaction with neighbors from other housing developments. Furthermore, they tended to have a negative perception about the other developments, in some cases referring to hearing gun shots at other developments and knowing of drug deals occurring.

Many resident respondents perceived a difference between their development and the others (and several were speaking from the experience of living in multiple developments):

*It's a different atmosphere on the other side of that fence.*

However, there were some whose perception is that the developments have more in common than not:

*Everything that goes on on this side, goes on in the other communities.*

A few respondents expressed their perceptions that Northwinds stands out as a development with a particularly negative reputation for being a more transient community where crime is higher and there are more frequent tenant evictions, a perception that was also shared by some of the outside stakeholders with whom we spoke. Additionally, Northwinds was pointed to by some residents as the property that would take in tenants who were evicted from the other developments. Within our convenience sample, Oakmont residents seemed generally more positive about the comparison of their development relative to the others. A community stakeholder surmised that the townhome design at Oakmont promoted a more positive community climate than the clusters of apartments in the other developments.

One key issue to consider is the use of gating and fencing around the developments. The residents we spoke to at Park Ridge were generally displeased with the gating around their development and described it as a “cage” and a “prison.” The Ferguson Police Department and the City of Ferguson required Park Ridge property management to put up the gating as a way to limit car traffic and aid the police in patrolling efforts.

On the other hand, residents we talked to at Canfield Green expressed an interest in having *more* fencing put up between their development and the others. In a troubling incident in October 2015, the property management company at Oakmont Townhomes made the unannounced move to erect a fence one morning to separate the Northwinds development from Oakmont Townhomes to stop Northwinds residents and others from using that route as a shortcut to W. Florissant. That afternoon the property manager of Oakmont started receiving calls from parents saying that their children who attend the local elementary school were stuck on the other side of the fence and unable get home. There are a number of barriers and barricades through the community which have a haphazard, divisive effect.

As one resident explained:

*The bus used to come here to pick up students. But the area has been fenced up and students need to travel farther. Streets are being blocked off to make things*

*more convenient for the police. We have to live here and blocking streets makes things more difficult for us. One way in and one way out is the wrong decision.*

## **Economic well-being**

The maps we presented earlier make clear that in the aggregate, the residents of the target area are among the most economically-deprived in the area. However, our conversations with residents and stakeholders provided a much more nuanced picture of the population's economic circumstances. While one of the premises for this report is that a mixed-income transformation of the isolated complexes may be a key to improving opportunity and the quality of life, the voices of the community indicate that to a large degree there is a mixed-income community already, though it is clearly skewed toward the very low-end of income and the upper end is in a moderate, not high, income range. A third of the residents in our sample reported having a housing choice voucher that subsidized their rent. A little less than a third reported being unemployed and looking for work. If we include those who said they were only working part-time and were looking for more work than at least half of our sample was unemployed or underemployed.

Some residents described the community as economically-mixed in various ways:

*There are some working class and some non-working class.*

*50 percent are employed and 50 percent are unemployed.*

*50 percent of people got cars and 50 percent take the bus.*

*Some people are well off but some are struggling.*

*There are some section 8, some buy in, and some are renting.*

*Some residents are living fair, some are below the poverty line.*

Over half of the resident respondents focused on the high levels of economic deprivation and "tough conditions" in the community. They described themselves and their neighbors as "struggling" and just making it "check to check." Overall, they see the area as high poverty with many residents reliant on government assistance. A typical description was many households are "just making it. Unable to thrive past that."

We compared perceptions of unemployed and employed residents on a number of factors and found that on most they shared similar views, including their descriptions of themselves as "poor," "low-income" and generally just getting by.

A relatively small number of the residents we spoke to, mainly the residents from the single-family homes in the neighborhood but also some of the residents in the developments, had a perception of a more thriving area of “middle class residents with jobs.” Some even had a perception that most of their neighbors, at least those in their vicinity, have jobs: “Everybody on my side goes to work. They work all day.”

### **Youth experiences**

The dominant themes in terms of life for youth in the target area are that there is far too few constructive activities to engage the youth of the community and that the youth are constantly harassed by the police. Many residents are highly critical of the youth, see their behavior as disrespectful and consider them to be mostly troublemakers. A smaller proportion of our resident respondents were quite sympathetic and feel that the youth are misunderstood and neglected.

*A crowd of young people [is] threatening to adults everywhere.*

*Youth are seen as aimless. They have a lack of direction. They have a lack of parental guidance. They are seen as a problem.*

*We have a lot of young people that really don't have anywhere to go or things to do, this has perpetuated in a lot of crime. We have so many young people that live here. They are really bringing the problems.*

There was considerable disagreement among our resident respondents as to whether the main problem is the youth's behavior or the way youth are treated and stigmatized by adults.

A young adult resident told us:

*There are no places for my younger brothers to play. They are 13 and 10 and if there was a place in the neighborhood I would not feel safe taking them.*

We also heard from youth and others that youth feel that they do not have a voice in the community.

Some community stakeholders we spoke with focused on the positive aspects of the youth population in Southeast Ferguson:

*There is a lot of talent and passion that is untapped. The community is full of vitality because there are a lot of young people.*

## DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE TARGET AREA AND BROADER COMMUNITY

While the five housing developments are located in the southeast corner of the city of Ferguson our conversations with residents made clear that there is very little sense of connection and belonging to the broader city. Indeed, when we asked residents to describe the geographic area beyond the developments that they consider their “broader community” we got a wide variety of answers. For some, their broader community is quite limited and only includes the retail area along West Florissant Ave. For others, their broader community extends in several directions around the developments to include retail areas in Ferguson as well as parts of the border cities of Jennings, Dellwood and Moline Acres. Some do consider the city of Ferguson as the broader community that is most relevant to them but differentiate “old Ferguson,” the more affluent part of the city, from the other more working-class portions of the city. One resident told us that for years he “didn’t even know this was part of Ferguson.”

Regardless of how they defined the broader community, the vast majority of residents we spoke to agreed that the housing developments are quite isolated and poorly connected to the outside world.

*It’s not [connected]. Because a lot of people that are living in different areas don’t interact with a lot of us here.*

The perception of isolation was shared even more strongly by the community stakeholders with whom we spoke.

*I don’t think that [residents] think they are connected to the broader side of Ferguson. I don’t think that the broader side of Ferguson chooses to be connected. The broader side of Ferguson doesn’t know the southeast side of Ferguson even exists.*

*Southeast Ferguson is off the grid. There is not an easy way to get here. It’s a dead end and you only come to this side of town if you have to.*

One property manager added the perception that the city “doesn’t care” about Southeast Ferguson. There were concerns that political leadership in the area is lacking and for Southeast Ferguson stakeholders, there is “no one to complain to.” One police officer and a property representative both described Southeast Ferguson as “a different world” from the rest of the city.

Among residents and community stakeholders, there is a shared sense of a stark socioeconomic disparity between Southeast Ferguson and other parts of the city with fewer employment opportunities, fewer amenities, and fewer businesses in their corner of the city.

*The southeast side is considered the ghetto, and the opposite side of Ferguson is considered the luxury side of Ferguson.*

*Parks in Southeast Ferguson are neglected [while] the parks on the other side are maintained and well kept.*

*I don't think we are connected. [It's] low-income over here. On the other side, [there are] houses. Apartment complexes on this side. I really don't go over that way. This is the farthest I've been [across West Florissant Ave. from Park Ridge development to Canfield Green development].*

As a property representative explained:

*There is no effort to connect with Southeast Ferguson. There is only lip service because they are forced to. The city fathers don't believe there is any benefit for their Ferguson to include Southeast Ferguson. This is grossly shortsighted not just for Ferguson but for the entire region.*

Making matters worse, there is a sense among many that the Michael Brown killing and subsequent unrest contributed to further isolating Southeast Ferguson from the rest of the community.

## RESIDENT NEEDS, LOCAL RESOURCES AND CRITICAL GAPS

### **Emergency needs**

For many of the target area residents who struggle to get by from day to day, emergency needs are the top priority. Data from the United Way 2-1-1 Helpline from 2014 reveals that the top five requested needs for residents in the area included support with electricity, gas, rent, food, and water assistance.

The most accessible emergency resources for residents of the target area are provided by the Better Family Life Resource Center, which is located in walking distance. Better Family Life resources include a food pantry, baby care products, utility assistance, rental and mortgage assistance, trauma counseling (in collaboration with Behavioral Health Response), and connections to employment resources. As of 2015, there were only two Better Family Life employees at the center along with paid youth interns from the community. Several of the residents we interviewed indicated that Better Family Life is the most valuable and most frequently used resource in the community. Some of the community stakeholder suggested that better coordination of the emergency resources available from various sources, including food and utility assistance, would be a key area for improvement. According to Operation Food Search there are 20 agencies and churches in zip codes 63136 and 63135 to which they make that food deliveries.

Other service providers that provide emergency assistance include North Oaks, Places for People, CAASTL, Urban League, Salvation Army, Blessed Teresa, and Jesus Family Services. These service providers also serve as references for Better Family Life, and while they provide the resources that families need, they are not easily accessible to residents who do not have cars.

### **Stores and Basic Amenities**

Residents expressed the need for more stores in their community to meet their basic needs. These stores include grocery stores, restaurants, and retail stores. Some of the community stakeholders described the Southeast Ferguson area as a food desert, lacking accessible and affordable grocery stores.

Sam's Meat Market is located on West Florissant Ave. and serves as the main grocery store and restaurant for many residents who are limited to shopping within walking distance. We visited the store and learned that prices of basic household items are high and many goods in the store do not have price labels. The conditions in the store make it difficult to shop within a budget. Additionally, there is a Schnucks supermarket approximately half a mile down West Florissant Ave. (from the intersection of West Florissant Ave. and Canfield Drive), and an Aldi grocery store over one mile away on Lucas and Hunt Road. While these grocery stores are not geographically distant, it would be challenging for residents who do not own a car to transport their groceries from the store back home.

Beyond meeting basic everyday needs, there is also a stark absence of other commercial outlets.

*They shut everything down. Bowling alley, ice skating ring, movies, the mall. They took everything that [gives you] joy away.*

### **Employment**

Residents described an overall lack of job opportunities in the community and described a need for more job training services.

We spoke with some local small business owners who expressed interest in hiring from within the community and helping to improve the economic wellbeing of the surrounding community. However, they find that the majority of applicants lack soft skills and are not work-ready.

From a few stakeholders and residents, we heard about Emerson Electric and Centene Corporation, which were committed to providing 200 new jobs in Ferguson each (United Way 2015), but as one resident put it:

*I'm not really sure who actually got the jobs over there. I don't think a lot of people from Ferguson got them. Ferguson people that applied didn't have the skills to get the jobs there anyway.*

Some residents we spoke to described having to work multiple jobs and piece together paychecks in order to survive. While there are some places where employment opportunities may be available, such as the Buzz Westfall plaza on West Florissant Ave., many of the businesses located in Southeast Ferguson are small and local and either do not need many employees to operate or cannot afford to have more than just a few employees on their payroll.

## **Youth**

Most of school-aged children in the City of Ferguson attend the schools in the Ferguson-Florissant School District. However, the southeast corner of Ferguson has been carved out of that district. These children attend schools in the Riverview Gardens School District that, until recently, was unaccredited (the district has recently achieved provisional accreditation from the State of Missouri). While some of the resident respondents expressed concerns about the quality of the local school, most were quite positive. In contrast, community stakeholders we interviewed had strong criticisms of the local school.

The ACE Learning Centers offers an alternative school setting for students struggling to meet academic standards at the Riverview District's middle and high schools. One Center is located at the target area at West Florissant Ave. and Canfield Drive. The program operates under a contract with the local school district. It offers classes in Math, Literature and reading, Social Studies and Science. Teaching is computer based and there is a teacher available for student support. This center has the capacity to serve 60 students – 45 high school and 15 middle school students. As of the beginning of 2016, this Center was operating at capacity and holds three sessions per day. Almost 100 percent of enrolled students are African American. According to the Center Director, most of the students have reading and math scores below grade level. The center deals with behavioral problems as well as low attendance rates. There is lack of resources for students who attend ACE, ranging from reliable computers, bus passes, and mental and behavioral health support. Another challenge experienced at the Learning Center is that the students come to class hungry and there are no resources to provide meals.

In interviews, resident respondents called for more after-school programs, programs that can help youth to improve their academic performance, and programs to help youth find jobs.

*Need more programs or resources for kids. Kids need to play more sports or more education to keep them from getting into whatever kind of trouble they are getting in, those kids in Northwinds and Oakmont.*

*There is nothing for youth to do and channel their energy. When you have such a high concentration of youth in any area without having positive activity available it becomes a recipe for disaster.*

*Anything to keep them preoccupied, sports-wise, that's helpful. Anything - football, basketball, soccer, anything to keep them busy and out of trouble. If they don't have homework, they have a lot of idle time.*

Many residents and community stakeholders agreed that a designated community space, such as a community center, would provide a location for a variety of services and resources to be offered. Some services residents discussed in interviews include after-school programming for youth, recreational activities, computer classes, High School Equivalency (HSE) classes, art or other “creativity” classes, exercise programs, day care services.

*I'm disappointed that Urban League hasn't gotten the construction going. That gave us false hope. Youngsters need a safe place to go. They need a purpose.*

A community organization called Operation Help Or Hush (OHOH) recently converted an old school building on Chambers Road into a safe community space for youth. However, we learned that merely months after the creation of this space, a shooting right outside of the school led to the closing of this space.

While there are many youth-serving organizations, agencies, and programs in Ferguson, most are not easily accessible to the target area youth. Community stakeholders and residents also felt that information about these programs is not effectively disseminated.

- The Ferguson Public Library provides academic tutoring to Ferguson youth. It is 2.5 miles away from the intersection of W. Florissant and Canfield Drive.
- The Ferguson Youth Initiative provides social programming and community service programming from a site in downtown Ferguson, 3 miles from the bus stop in Southeast Ferguson.
- The Ferguson Community Center is relatively new and is still developing its programming. The facility has a gym, computer lab, “youth space”, youth clubs and senior programming. However, reaching it from Southeast Ferguson requires a bus ride followed by a 15-minute walk. There is also a user fee of \$85/year for Ferguson residents and \$200/year for non-residents.

- The Dellwood Community Center is a 40-minute walk from Southeast Ferguson on a route without sidewalks, or a 15-minute bus ride from W. Florissant and Canfield Drive. This center offers a free after school program from Monday through Friday, 4:00-7:00 PM. The program includes tutoring, games and a hot meal.
- Riverview Gardens High School is 20 minutes from West Florissant Ave. and Canfield Drive by automobile. While the school makes an effort to provide transportation home to students who stay for after school activities, it is challenging for students from Southeast Ferguson to participate fully in after school tutoring or activities.
- Florissant Valley Community College has many programs to prepare students for careers or for continuing their educations at a 4-year university. Additionally, they have academic remediation resources to help students to succeed in college-level course work. These resources are available on campus to students who are enrolled at FVCC. There may be partnerships with area high schools but it is unclear if they are reaching into the residential community to help put youth on a path to college.

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis is embarking on the construction of a Community Empowerment Center, on the site of the former Quik-Trip shop on West Florissant Ave., which was burned down during the 2014 unrest. The site was contributed to the Urban League by Quik-Trip. The site is adjacent to the target area. The Urban League plans to build out and occupy one story and to invite several partners to share the 13,000 square foot, two-story space.

The vision for the Empowerment Center is to provide the resources for economic advancement for individuals and the community. It is not intended to be an emergency services center. The Urban League will be providing their Save Our Sons employment program, housing counseling, homeownership education and financial literacy. Save our Sons is a four-week program to prepare men ages 17 and older for employment. There will be an adult Business Development Computer Lab where Microsoft Office professional suite will be taught using an Urban League curriculum. Better Family Life will provide programming in areas of employment, housing counseling and arts. Provident Counseling, Inc. will be providing mental health counseling for adults but the Urban League was not certain whether the counseling services would be available to youth. University of Missouri Extension (UM Extension) will be providing youth programming, to likely include a life skills and character building program. Lutheran Church Missouri Synod will be providing some youth programming services. The Salvation Army Midland Division has plans to add a second story to the Community Empowerment Center – this would represent a major re-engagement with the North County area for the Salvation Army. Ultimately, this future Community Empowerment

Center presents an opportunity to provide residents in Southeast Ferguson with a centralized source of support and resources, as well as a safe recreational space for youth, a much needed amenity in the area.

Stakeholders indicated that better systems need to be created to raise youth awareness of services, including overall improved communication and partnership between organizations. Additionally, organizations need additional support in order to better serve youth, including additional staffing and funding, and assistance with youth engagement, motivation and mentoring.

Regarding the issue of promoting greater youth voice and influence on local programs and strategies, there is a local youth commission, the Ferguson Youth Advisory Board, but it was described by one respondent as “an old fashioned approach” and not the most effective way to reach and engage the youth of today.

One opportunity to address these issues is through the Wyman Center’s implementation of the Youth Thrive™ framework. Youth Thrive™ is a successful national approach of advancing adolescent health and well-being by supporting the whole child, including trauma-informed approaches. The Wyman Center has been implementing Youth Thrive™ training and supports in the St. Louis region and is interested in expanding and targeting its efforts in the Ferguson area. Wyman currently serves 1,100 students in the area through a deep partnership with three school districts located in and around the Ferguson area including Ferguson Middle School, the Normandy Seventh and Eighth Grade Center and the Brittany Woods Middle School.

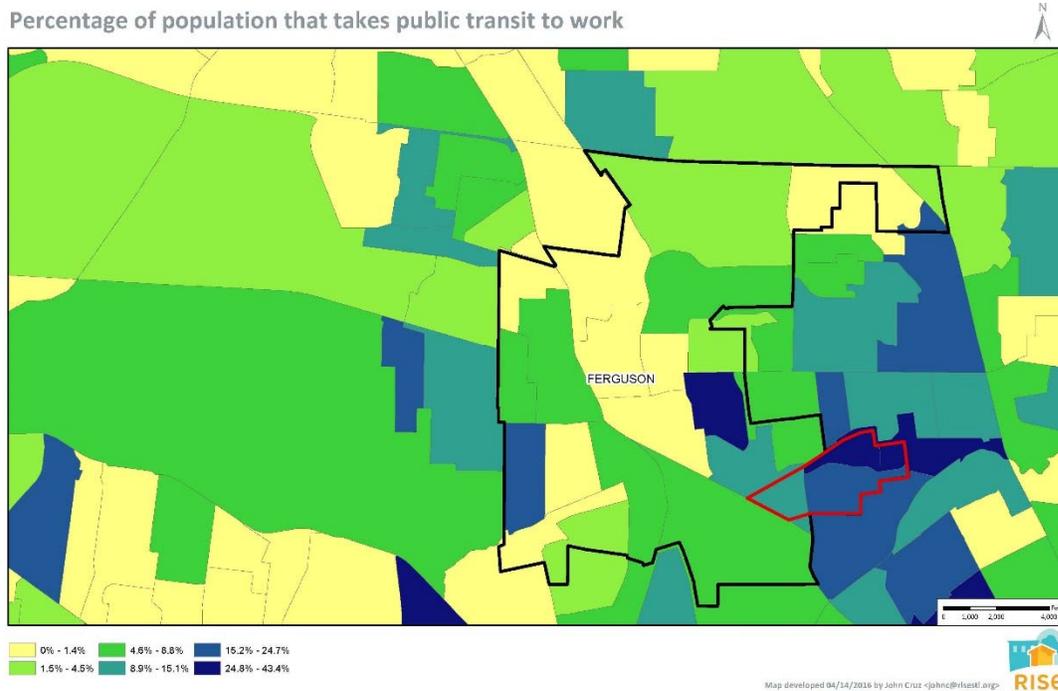
Wyman also maintains partnerships with three key universities serving the St. Louis region – St. Louis University, University of Missouri St. Louis and Washington University in St. Louis. These university partnerships provide an opportunity to get students in internship and practicum roles in agencies and community organizations in Ferguson, presenting an opportunity to provide additional capacity in youth engagement efforts.

Another opportunity to address the challenges discussed above are through taking advantage of resources that will be made available through the St. Louis Promise Zone designation. In April 2015, the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership’s application to designate portions of the City of Saint Louis and St. Louis County as a Promise Zone. The St. Louis Promise Zone encompasses portions of North St. Louis County and North St. Louis City, and includes parts of Ferguson. Promise Zone designation does not include an award of dollars. However, the designation allows communities to work directly with federal, state and local agencies in eliminating red tape and better aligning resources in order to improve quality of life. The designation has a 10-year duration and all designated sites will have priority access to federal investments. In addition, Promise Zone designation provides technical assistance and full-time AmeriCorps VISTA members to help implement goals identified as a priority. For St. Louis, these goals are: increasing economic

activity, reducing violent crime, improving educational outcomes, creating sustainable mixed-income communities, and improving health and wellness.

## Transportation

A challenge emphasized by some residents and stakeholders is inadequate public transportation for residents in the area. The map below shows the relatively high proportion of target area residents that rely on public transit.



There are some available transportation services for elderly adults and residents who are disabled, including Call-A-Ride and the Jolley Trolley. Call-A-Ride requires a reservation in advance and is only available to ADA-Eligible customers; Jolley Trolley is only available to residents who are 60 years and older.

Since interviews were conducted for this assessment, the North County Transit Center opened at 3140 Pershall Road in Ferguson. This new transit hub, along with MetroBus route changes, present a possible opportunity for residents to have increased access to amenities located in other parts of the area. According to the MetroBus website, these changes will result in “more frequent service, more direct service, faster transfers and connections to more destinations throughout the region.” However, bus fares may still present a barrier to residents who cannot afford the costs of transportation. MetroBus does not offer reduced fares to youth over the age of 12.

## Policing

More than a year after Michael Brown's death, residents of the target area reported to us that there is still a negative relationship with the Ferguson police. Residents described experiencing racial discrimination and stereotyping from police.

*Especially black males... We don't want to be labeled as gangsters, thugs because we are black... I don't want to be part of the community right now because all the issues and racial profiling.*

*I can't even sit in front of [my] own house without being yelled at by the police with a bullhorn.*

*Twenty years ago, police would engage with the community, now police drive through the community with windows up, completely disengaged.*

*The police need to know the community. Quit ignoring us and build a relationship. The police are not putting in any effort.*

*There are few police officers that care... If you call the police reporting gun shots and the police respond, 'Are you sure you need the police?'*

The Ferguson police department has launched a new "permanent sector policing system." Under the new sector policing system, the City of Ferguson has been divided into several sectors. Through a combination of volunteering and selection, the department will identify 4-5 officers who will be assigned to police Southeast Ferguson. The hope is that this new approach will create a sense of ownership, accountability and an environment where the police officers will interact with residents and develop a relationship with the community.

The police have begun holding monthly co-op meetings with the property management teams to improve communication and coordination. Recently there has been a decision to focus more on direct meetings between the police and residents.

Several residents suggested that the police should shift to more of a community policing approach and spend more time out of their cars interacting with residents and building relationships, rather than patrolling from within their cars.

The city of Ferguson has hired Peter Bellmio, an independent consultant from Annapolis, MD who has worked with other cities across the country on implementing constitutional neighborhood policing practices. Bellmio will lead a process to garner input from citizen stakeholders to shape neighborhood policing practices in Ferguson. Delrish Moss, a 32-year veteran of Miami Florida's police department was sworn in as the new Ferguson police chief on Monday, May 9th, 2016.

## PERSPECTIVES ON ENDING ISOLATION THROUGH MIXED-INCOME TRANSFORMATION

An increasing number of cities around the country are turning to the mixed-income transformation of low-income communities as a way to address concentrated poverty and social isolation. Housing complexes are rebuilt or renovated to accommodate a mix of market-rate and subsidized housing, all at a high design quality with strong community amenities such as parks and community centers. Some of the most well-known and long-standing mixed-income redevelopments are in the St. Louis area, including Westminster Place and Renaissance Place.

We asked residents and stakeholders for their perspectives on a mixed-income transformation. There was a wide range of responses from very positive to strongly negative – but overall the positive comments outnumbered the negative comments over two to one. Interestingly, there were far more negative comments from unemployed respondents: about two-thirds of unemployed residents raised concerns about the downsides of mixed-income development compared to about one-third of employed residents. Respondents at Park Ridge and Northwinds (perceived as the most economically and socially challenged developments) were relatively more negative than residents at Oakmont and Canfield Green. Surprisingly, residents of the single-family homes in the area were also relatively more negative about increasing economic diversity.

On the positive side, some residents suggested living in a mixed-income community would improve social dynamics and facilitate stronger social networks. A mixed-income community would provide greater opportunities to interact with neighbors:

*I don't think there would be any problems; in fact, it would be better and give a balance. Meeting different people may make people be friendly neighbors and start having conversations together.*

Others thought it would help neighbors get along by establishing a sense of community or creating a sense of community solidarity and respect for each other:

*If we all coming together to build something could make us stronger. A strong community comes together where everyone believes in each other.*

Some residents suggested that a more diverse context would offer opportunities to see different perspectives and ideas.

*Blending and getting along helps people have an exposure and experience to difference.*

*If people were willing to be open-minded they could learn from each other. If you have a skill that your neighbor doesn't have, you can teach the skill. You can learn from diversity.*

*Mixed-income housing would be positive for low-income residents because it would expose them to what's possible.*

Some residents felt that a mixed-income community would also encourage a culture shift. This culture shift could generate more respect for others' differences and living in a cooperative environment. Part of this culture shift might inspire or influence behavioral change through providing inspiration and motivation to residents.

*Great idea, because it may motivate and incentivize some people to move forward in life.*

*It would be awesome to have a mixed-income community. If the care of the property was increased, you would attract higher-income level families. I don't foresee any negatives in this type of housing. One benefit of this type of housing will provide inspiration to the low-income families. As a middle-income earner there may be some gratification to being a role model or inspiration to others. This type of housing reestablishes a sense of community.*

Others noted that a mixed-income community could provide more opportunities for role models for youth and provide exposure to different lifestyles and careers. A few residents also mentioned that it would improve safety of the community.

*No one will be hanging or causing trouble with the neighborhood.*

Some residents discussed how creating a mixed-income community would help to bring more resources and opportunities to Southeast Ferguson, such as small businesses and better transportation. Additionally, residents indicated that more investment would be put into the local schools, which would enhance the schools:

*It would be good to bring more diverse input and involvement to the schools. This could enhance the schools. Good to do something different.*

While economic diversity was seen as a positive by some residents, others described potential conflicts that could emerge from living in a diverse community, including jealousy, prejudice, racial tensions, tensions over community power and influence, frictions over different norms and expectations, and a general fear of negatively changing community culture and norms.

*Diversity promotes anger and jealousy and causes more problems.*

*It would bring more chaos to have different people living side-by-side.*

*People with high incomes may have an attitude of being better than low-income people, and that may cause conflict.*

*It could be blacks against the whites or the rich against the poor.*

*If people work for what they have, they take better care of it. I'm not against Section 8, but if you have Section 8 people who don't work mixed in with working people, unless the person has been brought up with standards, goals, morals, it could be a problem.*

*Different styles of living could cause a problem.*

*Stuff that we don't trip off, they will. Like noise levels. Like being on the grass.*

There were also concerns expressed about whether a mixed-income transformation would result in gentrification and displacement.

Overall, it seems as though residents felt that creating a mixed-income community would be beneficial to the community, with some conditions. One of these conditions is that residents would have to be accepting of each other and have respect for their neighbors:

*I am for that idea...as long as there is a respect level for people making varying incomes. What matters is the mindset. People shouldn't be threatened because of what they lack or own.*

*No one is no different than the other... It's a good idea... Just because you're a different color than I am, doesn't mean you're better than me.*

*As long as you do the right thing, it doesn't matter. I don't care about income. I don't care if you make less than I do, I care about being respected and that everyone gets along.*

*We would have to ease this in. We have to explain why the [higher-income] people are moving in here and ease them in. We have to get rid of anger and suspicion.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND FURTHER INQUIRY

Overall, respondents report having very little sense of connection and belonging to the broader area. They describe a persistent feeling of geographic, economic and social isolation. This portrayal of life in Southeast Ferguson emerged from residents and other community stakeholders alike; a stark socioeconomic disparity between Southeast Ferguson and other parts of the city and region was revealed in interviewee responses.

While there has been much civic and community dialogue about how to address the region's challenges, most notably by Forward Through Ferguson and FOCUS St. Louis (see Appendix for Forward Through Ferguson Action Tracker), among other organizations, our recommendations focus on the Southeast Ferguson area and the concerns of residents that live in Canfield Green, Northwinds, Park Ridge, Oakmont, and Versailles. The following recommendations are aimed at addressing the various forms of social and economic isolation experienced by Southeast Ferguson residents:

- 1) Ensure that residents have access to available, responsive supports based on their actual needs, as the result of developing a more coordinated and comprehensive social service model that promotes more widespread and effective use of existing services, creates a community space for residents, and leverages and coordinates new, emerging opportunities in the region.
- 2) Focus on resident and youth engagement and organizing, with a strong focus on broader approaches to youth development, as a way to promote more social cohesion and influence within Southeast Ferguson, better connect Southeast Ferguson to the rest of the city and the region, and more effectively advocate for systems change.
- 3) Promote a shift toward community-engaged policing to strengthen relationships between Southeast Ferguson residents and the Ferguson Police Department.
- 4) Leverage the positive aspects of mixed-income transformation while addressing residents' concerns surrounding this type of transformation.

### **1) Develop a New Strategy for Delivering Services in Southeast Ferguson**

#### Promote more widespread and effective use of existing services

*Information Dissemination:* A first step toward creating a more effective service system in Southeast Ferguson would be a deliberate strategy to better inform individuals and families of resources and supports available to them. Equipped with knowledge of available resources, Southeast Ferguson residents would be more likely to take advantage of already existing services. This strategy could include multiple ways for service providers to communicate with Southeast Ferguson residents more completely and intentionally, ranging from making information available where individuals and families are likely to be (such as in

schools, or posting information in local businesses), to more actively using Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

*Better Access for Residents through Service Coordination and Performance Tracking:* Currently, according to residents, services are not always easy for Southeast Ferguson residents to access, and they often seem uncoordinated. To help make services more seamless for residents, steps can be taken to better link current services, organize them around an individual or family's needs and thus yield more effective service delivery. As part of service coordination, we recommend consideration of a "case coordination" system for families and individuals receiving supportive services. Such coordination would allow families' service needs to be addressed more efficiently, help identify service gaps, and connect residents to the appropriate providers and community resources more effectively. Service and case coordination will be especially important for youth-serving agencies, so that young people's multiple needs can be met and a full range of opportunities can be provided, reaching across the domains of youth development, education, preparation for employment, health and others to promote better youth outcomes.

To allow service providers to track their own progress, learn and continuously improve their programs and services in Southeast Ferguson, some type of performance measurement system should be developed as a way to further refine the appropriate interventions and programs and ensure that services are addressing residents' needs. Organizations leading change efforts might consider the "collective impact" model of organizational collaboration that is now being used to strong effect in many cities, as well as the tools of Results-Based Accountability, which can help diverse providers work well together toward common well-being outcomes for children, youth, families and other residents.

With the construction of the new Community Empowerment Center (see below), the Urban League and the Salvation Army are both well-positioned to facilitate and coordinate services for individuals and families. Coordinating the work of partner organizations to identify and fill service gaps and to avoid duplication of services will make a major impact in the community.

#### A resource for residents: Community Empowerment Center

The future Urban League Community Empowerment Center presents an opportunity to provide residents in Southeast Ferguson with a centralized source of support and resources, an amenity that many resident respondents called for in interviews. Creating a community center would address many of the resource gaps that resident respondents and stakeholders highlighted. If the right set of partners provide services out of the space, a variety of challenges that Southeast Ferguson residents face could be addressed in a one-stop-shop fashion:

**Financial empowerment.** Provide Southeast Ferguson residents who need assistance with banking, financial education, or other financial services the opportunity to meet with a financial coach. This will equip families and individuals with knowledge and programmatic support to successfully manage their finances and build assets.

**Employment.** Increase employment opportunities for residents, especially for transitioning-aged youth and young males (18-24 years). The Community Empowerment Center can provide the necessary employment services and supports, connecting residents to employment in the area. Another recommendation is to intentionally enhance collaboration between educational institutions and employers.

*Save our Sons and Pathway of Hope.* We recommend that the Salvation Army modify and bolster its Pathway of Hope program, connecting and collaborating with the Urban League's Save our Sons program to support young adults graduating from Save Our Sons program at the Community Empowerment Center.

**Education.** Provide additional educational opportunities for Southeast Ferguson residents of all ages, including GED classes and early childhood education programs. The Center could also serve as a location for high-quality after school programs that can provide academic support, explore extracurricular interests, and provide them with constructive activities during after-school hours.

*Youth: After-School Support and Tutoring.* To ensure that an after-school program is genuinely supporting academic success, program staff will need to collaborate with school districts to determine expected grade level performance. A functioning computer lab and a technology instructor would further benefit youth in this space.

**Meeting space.** The Center can provide a space, such as conference or meeting rooms, for the community to utilize and convene around issues. See *Promote strong connections within and among developments* below.

**Youth: Safe Space.** The center should be a youth-friendly, safe and welcoming space where youth can enjoy unstructured but wholesome activities. The Center should be open outside traditional business hours so that the community can access services and amenities after school hours, in the evenings, and on the weekends in order to meet the needs of the community.

Other, existing local organizations that the future Community Empowerment Center can coordinate with to provide services and resources include:

- The Center for Social Empowerment and Justice

- Better Family Life
- Ferguson Youth Initiative

### Leverage and coordinate new emerging local and regional opportunities

Part of a new social service model for Southeast Ferguson would include tapping in to new opportunities and partnerships in larger Ferguson and St. Louis. Leveraging new opportunities in the region would bring more resources in to Ferguson as well as help connect Southeast Ferguson to initiatives happening in other parts of Ferguson and St. Louis.

Below are two examples of current opportunities to capitalize on in the larger region:

#### *The St. Louis Promise Zone*

As discussed above, the St. Louis Promise Zone presents opportunities to work directly with federal, state, and local agencies, have access to technical assistance, and provides additional staff through AmeriCorps to implement goals around increasing economic activity; reducing violent crime; improving educational outcomes; creating sustainable mixed-income communities; and, improving health and wellness. We recommend that organizations leading change efforts in Southeast Ferguson take advantage of the Promise Zone designation, as it will be a valuable resource to further local efforts. For example, of twenty-four total CDFIs present in the State of Missouri, there are seven that are certified by the Federal Department of Treasury and available for the Saint Louis Metropolitan area. The funds from these CDFIs can support programs around financial literacy, access to fresh food, entrepreneurship and reentry.

#### *Wyman Center: Local implementation of Youth Thrive™ approach*

Wyman is interested in expanding an emerging model to align wrap-around services using the Youth Thrive™ framework. The aim of Youth Thrive™ is to produce positive outcomes for youth in physical and emotional health, success in school and workplace, ability to form and sustain caring, committed relationships, hopefulness, optimism, compassion and curiosity, and service to community, school or society. The framework focuses on factors that increase the likelihood that youth can develop into healthy, thriving adults, including youth resilience, social connections, knowledge of adolescent development, concrete support in times of need, and cognitive and social-emotional competence.

The Children's Services Coalition is a network of approximately 50 youth providers serving youth from across the region through which Wyman could

bring and support Youth Thrive™ training across a cadre of providers committed to using research-informed approaches.

Additionally, Wyman's partner universities – St. Louis University, University of Missouri St. Louis and Washington University in St. Louis – are often looking for applicable, research-based opportunities to bring back to their students which directly focus on student success and effective relationship building with adolescents. Many of these university students, in turn, are placed in internship and practicum roles in schools and agencies serving Ferguson and the surrounding region. Youth Thrive™ training could provide a critical foundation for these students as they transition as new professionals in our region.

## **2) Community Engagement, Outreach and Youth Organizing to Address Isolation**

### Promote strong connections within and among developments

There is currently little organization among residents within the developments or among developments, and no tenant groups exist within any of the developments. However, there are strong informal social networks among some residents which could serve as building blocks for better organization. Several resident respondents we talked to have lived in the area for over 10 years, and some have lived in the area for between six and 10 years. These residents could be galvanized to form the basis of a tenant organization or network. Challenges to anticipate are the high transiency rate, strong differences of perspective and opinion among residents, the physical barriers between the developments and the history of lack of joint action and activity.

Providing support for resident and youth organizing would potentially lead to increased advocacy, leadership, power, and voice across the five housing developments in Southeast Ferguson. This would allow residents and youth to come together to identify priorities for new resource development and, over the longer term, for changes in systems and institutions that affect their lives. In addition, residents and young people can increase their own skills and capacity to be leaders, advocating for themselves and their communities.

### Promote broader integration beyond the housing developments

Given the deep and enduring isolation of this area, it will take strong intentionality by stakeholders and organizations in the surrounding area to implement strategies to promote the stronger integration of target area residents into the broader community. These strategies should include connecting residents to resources within walking distance as well as determining how best to connect them to opportunities in the surrounding areas of Ferguson, Jennings, Dellwood and other local communities.

Additional, specific areas of focus to integrate the housing developments include collaboration between community organizations and property management and transportation access:

**Community organizations and property management collaboration.** There is an opportunity for local organizations and institutions to reach out and work more closely with the property managers at the developments. Several of the property owners and managers have expressed an interest in providing space for service providers.

**Transportation.** Improving access to public transportation for Southeast Ferguson residents would allow them to connect with more resources outside their immediate community. Part of access includes the transit fees, and currently there is no reduced fare for youth over the age of 12. Reducing fares for this age group would remove a barrier and allow youth and young adults to better access employment or educational opportunities in the area.

#### Focus on Youth Development and Youth Organizing

While all residents of Southeast Ferguson experience disconnect among the developments and isolation from the rest of Ferguson, this disconnect is particularly strong for youth. Young people in the target area are isolated physically, socially, economically, and politically from the rest of Ferguson and other parts of the region.

This situation also creates an opportunity, however. With new resources for young people likely to come into the area (e.g., the Community Empowerment Center), there is a chance both to enrich services for youth and also create opportunities for young people to take leadership, express their own priorities and advocate for actions that are important to them. This will require that agencies serving young people in Southeast Ferguson create the space and forums for young people to express what their needs are and be key actors and agents of change in designing system-level solutions for those needs.

In creating the possibilities for young people to organize and take leadership in this way, it is usually helpful to have a framework that coordinates such efforts. One suggestion is to learn from, and possibly build upon, the lessons learned from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative, a successful national initiative aimed at assisting young people successfully age out of foster care. Currently, the Jim Casey Initiative is active in 17 sites across the United States, and in all of these, youth have been organized to have impact upon the services and systems that matter most to them. (While the Jim Casey Initiative is geared toward foster care youth specifically, the principles and processes that it has used to bring young people together, empower them to take action and build leadership skills could be adapted to efforts in Southeast Ferguson.) Creating opportunities through which youth empower themselves can have benefits for the young people

themselves, the agencies who work with them, and the broader community (See Appendix).

Efforts to engage and empower young people will be strongest if they are part of a well-coordinated effort among existing youth serving agencies to develop a coherent youth development agenda in Ferguson, and particularly in Southeast Ferguson. Such an effort could bring together the considerable skills and expertise of current youth-serving agencies and initiatives, including:

- Ferguson Youth Initiative
- Wyman Teen Leadership and Outreach Programs
- Boys and Girls Club programming
- Better Family Life outreach

### **3) Help Promote a Shift toward More Community-Engaged Policing**

Determine how best to leverage the opportunity of the new police chief to promote a continued shift in policing strategy toward more engagement through community policing.

St. Louis County and St. Louis City Police Departments have both established policing strategies to better engage the community. The St. Louis County Police department has developed a Neighborhood Policing approach that is a partnership of the police department and neighborhoods. Part of the Neighborhood Policing approach involves Neighborhood Policing Initiatives, in which community members and the police department work together to address specific issues or challenges. The St. Louis City Police Department launched the Community Engagement and Organizational Development Division in April 2015. This new office's goals include implementing community outreach programs and provide training for officers on ethics, de-escalation tactics, and implicit biases. Ferguson Police Department should look toward St. Louis County and St. Louis City Police Departments for lessons learned from these strategies to bolster their community-engaged policing efforts.

Community-engaged policing efforts should include training police to better engage residents as a way to lead to more positive police-community interactions, focusing on positive, proactive police interactions with youth. Specific ways to improve police-youth relationships include engaging youth in joint training with police, creating opportunities in schools for positive, non-enforcement interactions between students and the police, and developing programs, such as youth leadership training, that collaborate with the police.

The new permanent sector policing strategy will need to be assessed to evaluate its effectiveness and impact on fostering more positive relationships between residents and the Ferguson Police Department.

#### **4) Housing: Leverage Positive Aspects of Mixed-Income Transformation while Confronting Legitimate Concerns**

In cities across the U.S., including St. Louis, mixed-income transformation has proven to be an effective means of generating the public-private sector partnerships and resources to undertake the dramatic physical transformation of housing and community amenities to create economically diverse complexes. Blending affordable and market-rate housing these developments offer stable, high quality housing and have been associated with reduced crime and increased investments in the surrounding neighborhood. An intentional, proactive commitment to community building and promoting individual household stability and economic mobility is a fundamental component of the mixed-income strategy.

As opportunities emerge to plan for a mixed-income transformation of the developments, it will be vital to acknowledge and address the wide range of concerns that were voiced by residents about the potential downsides of such an approach. Emerging best practices for dealing with the challenging social dynamics should be introduced and discussed. Urban Strategies has deep experience in St. Louis and around the country in promoting resident engagement and building human capital in mixed-income developments. The National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities at Case Western Reserve University is an additional resource for identifying best practices and strategies in this area. There should be more exposure for residents through site visits and learning exchanges to examples of successful physical transformation and improved quality of life in existing St. Louis mixed-income developments. Given that the strongest concerns were raised among unemployed residents and residents of the more challenged developments, special effort should be made to engage those residents in discussions and planning through an inclusive visioning process that promotes relationship building and community engagement.

## APPENDIX

### Respondent Demographics

#### **Residents**

##### *Resident age*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Under 18</b>	2	2.9
<b>18-24</b>	9	13.2
<b>25-44</b>	18	26.5
<b>45-64</b>	30	44.1
<b>65+</b>	9	13.2

##### *Residential location*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>
<b>Canfield Green</b>	10	14.7	9
<b>Oakmont</b>	11	16.2	3
<b>Northwinds</b>	9	13.2	9
<b>Park Ridge</b>	18	26.5	17
<b>Other Neighbor</b>	20	29.4	16

##### *Length of time lived in Ferguson area*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Less than 1 year</b>	8	11.8
<b>1-3 years</b>	22	32.4
<b>4-5 years</b>	15	22.1
<b>6-10 years</b>	11	16.2
<b>Over 10 years</b>	12	17.6

## Race

	Frequency	Percent
<b>African American/Black</b>	21	53.8
<b>Caucasian/White</b>	16	41.0
<b>Other</b>	2	5.1

## Stakeholders

### Stakeholder type

	Frequency
<b>Business</b>	6
<b>City/County</b>	8
<b>Community*</b>	9
<b>Police</b>	3
<b>Property</b>	11
<b>School</b>	2

\*Community includes: Community organizations, service organizations, other nonprofits, churches

### Property stakeholders

	Frequency
<b>Canfield Green</b>	6
<b>Oakmont</b>	4
<b>Northwinds</b>	1
<b>Park Ridge</b>	0

## Methods

This assessment involved two phases: informal information gathering and data collection. In the initial information gathering phase, research team members from Urban Strategies, Inc. and CSSP sought out critical stakeholders and resident leaders in order to gather information for a separate, but related, assessment for the Salvation Army. During this phase the research team was able to lay the groundwork for the formal data gathering.

The data collection phase of this assessment involved interviewing 68 residents from the target area and 39 stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives from businesses, the City and County, community-serving organizations, police, school representatives, and property management and staff.

Interviews were audiotaped and detailed notes were taken to capture the conversation with interviewees. Interview notes were analyzed using ATLAS.ti.

### Links to Selected Resources

Children’s Services Coalition

<http://csc-stl.org/>

Ferguson Youth Initiative

<http://fyiferyouth.org/>

Forward Through Ferguson Action Tracker

*The Forward Through Ferguson Action Tracker documents implementation efforts on the Ferguson Commission’s Forward Through Ferguson Signature Priorities.*

<http://forwardthroughferguson.org/implementation/>

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

<http://www.aecf.org/work/child-welfare/jim-casey-youth-opportunities-initiative/>

St. Louis Promise Zone

<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=PromiseZoneMO.pdf>

Wyman Center Teen Leadership Program

<http://wymancenter.org/tlp/>

Youth Thrive™

<http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youththrive>