

Community Needs Assessment

Ruby Lake Neighborhood

Riverbend City

Executive Report

Prepared by:

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Background

Ruby Lake is a neighborhood in Riverbend City's near south side, southwest of downtown. As of the last census reading, the population of Ruby Lake was 7,324. The population is approximately 75 percent Latino.

A community needs assessment was conducted in the Ruby Lake neighborhood because the previous assessment took place ten years prior and has become outdated. In the past decade, the population of the Ruby Lake has changed dramatically. Since the 1930s, Ruby Lake has been primarily a Polish American neighborhood. The Polish American population gradually began to decline in the past 25 years. Throughout the history of the Ruby Lake neighborhood, there has always been a significant Latino minority population. In the last ten years, the Latino population has become the majority.

To determine the needs of the Ruby Lake neighborhood, a Ruby Lake Needs Assessment Committee was formed. Then a variety of research methods were used to determine the severity of these needs. Ten small focus group interviews were conducted with adults and teenagers in the neighborhood. A survey was devised and conducted, and 349 residents completed the surveys. In addition, statistical research was conducted to measure the severity of problems in Ruby Lake as compared to other Riverbend City neighborhoods and to predominantly Latino neighborhoods in comparable cities.

Key Findings

1. Education and Concerns about Youth

The high school graduation rate at Ruby Lake High School was a major concern that was cited in all but one of the focus groups, and was ranked as a serious concern by over 70 percent of the survey participants. In Riverbend City, the graduation rate in recent years has improved from 56 percent five years ago to 65 percent last year. However, these rates are still low compared to the city average of 76 percent.

In relation to the problem of low graduation rates, over 80% percent of survey participants ranked after-school programs as “very important” or “important.” However, only 11% of participants indicated they were “satisfied” or “completely satisfied” with the availability of after-school programs.

Compared to other neighborhoods in the city, the Ruby Lake neighborhood has a smaller percentage of students enrolled in after-school programs than in any neighborhood besides the Newark neighborhood. In fact, there are no after-school programs located in the Ruby lake neighborhood; students who do participate primarily attend programs at Washington Allston Elementary School and Lonnie Weissenberger Middle School, which are located to the north of the Ruby Lake neighborhood. According to several nationwide surveys (see appendix B), there is a well-established link between higher graduation rates and good after-school programs.

Another concern that emerged in all of the focus groups with teenagers was teen pregnancy. Statistically, this is indeed a problem in the Ruby Lake neighborhood. Two years ago, the birth rate for 15–17 year old girls in the Ruby Lake neighborhood was the highest in Riverbend City—94 per 1000 live births. In comparison, the citywide rate was 44.5 per 1000 births. Moreover, the teen pregnancy rate for 15–17 year old Latinas nationwide was only 83.5 per 1000 births. While the historically high teen pregnancy rates for Latinas nationwide have dropped over the last ten years, this trend does not seem to be the case in Ruby Lake. According to high school administrators, the pregnancy rate at the high school has gone up steadily over the past five years—to the point that the on-premise daycare center may have to refuse care to girls with children because they have run out of room.

2. Jobs and Unemployment in the Ruby Lake Neighborhood

The unemployment rate in Ruby Lake is 12.7 percent, as compared to the citywide 8.7 percent. The unemployment rate for 16 to 25 year olds in Ruby Lake is 18.4 percent, as opposed to 10.3 percent citywide.

Unemployment and the lack of jobs in the area was a concern that discussed by all but one of the focus groups. On the survey, when asked about “availability of employment opportunities,” 80 percent of participants said they were “completely unsatisfied” or “unsatisfied.” The statistics were nearly identical when participants were asked about “availability of youth employment opportunities.”

The unemployment rate in the Ruby Lake neighborhood skyrocketed eighteen months ago when the Schneider Chemical Plant closed. The plant, which was located on Tollefson Parkway at the southern end of the neighborhood, closed after 35 years, and over 850 jobs were lost. The plant has always been a major employer of Latinos throughout the city, especially in the Ruby Lake neighborhood.

Focus group participants cited the need for job retraining programs so that displaced workers can learn new skills. Indeed, statistics show that in the health care and hi-tech industries—the two most successful job sectors in Riverbend City—Latinos are highly underrepresented.

3. Crime in the Ruby Lake Neighborhood

Participants in all ten focus groups expressed concern over what they perceive to be a growing crime rate. On the survey, when asked about “neighborhood safety,” 75 percent of participants said they were “completely unsatisfied” or “unsatisfied.” In the open-ended comments on the survey, 59 percent of those who answered the question, “What are three things you dislike about this community?” mentioned crime-related concerns. About 40 percent of these participants mentioned concerns about gangs.

Indeed, crime is a growing problem in Ruby Lake. The violent crime rate is down by 6 percent over the last five years. However, property crimes are up by 17 percent over the last five years, and the city has one of the highest property crime rates in the city. Moreover, a recent citywide study of gang activity indicates that gang activity is growing faster in the Ruby Lake neighborhood than anywhere else in the city.

4. Health Care Concerns in the Ruby Lake Neighborhood

At the initial Ruby Lake Community Needs Assessment Committee meeting, concern was raised about rates of metabolic syndrome and related problems such as diabetes in the Ruby Lake neighborhood. For the past six years, the Department of Public Health at Beck University has conducted a study and a related health promotion campaign of seven ethnic neighborhoods in the region, including Ruby Lake. The study indicates

that metabolic syndrome and related problems such as diabetes are down in the Ruby lake neighborhood, perhaps in part because of the health promotion campaign (see Appendix C).

Another concern that was raised at the Community Needs Assessment Meeting was the lack of availability of fresh produce and large grocery stores in the neighborhood. This concern was echoed on the survey. When asked about the availability of good grocery stores, only 35% of participants indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied.”

Recommended Next Steps

- Increase crime prevention efforts in the Ruby Lake neighborhood, with an emphasis on gang prevention.
- Develop a job training program for both older and younger adult workers, with an emphasis on building marketable job skills in the Riverbend City economy.
- Improve existing high school retention initiatives.
- Develop after-school programs for elementary, middle, and high school students in the community, with a emphasis on both academic and physical fitness programs.
- Develop teen pregnancy prevention programs at the middle and high school level.
- Continue health promotion efforts to decrease the rate of metabolic syndrome and diabetes in the community.
- Increase efforts to bring affordable, fresh food into the community, including the creation of a community garden.



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Credits

RIVERBEND CITY: ACTION RESEARCH PLANNING MISSION

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO RIVERBEND CITY

Expository Text: The Riverbend City mayor's office recently conducted a needs assessment of the Ruby Lake neighborhood, a low-income neighborhood that is primarily Latino. The neighborhood's high unemployment rate was identified as a serious problem.

In response, members of the state Workforce Investment Board convene at the neighborhood's "one-stop center," which is a local job training and placement facility created per the mandate of the Workforce Investment Act. At the meeting, board members discuss a strategy—a program to assess and train workers for advanced manufacturing jobs.

Instructional Text: The three scenes in this mission illustrate the first phase of the Action Research Inquiry Model—"Plan for Research and Address the Problem." As you watch, consider the degree to which the WIB and other stakeholders utilize the ARIC model effectively.

Characters in this Mission:

Charles Elton - Veterans Affairs Administrator
 Jeanne Warren-Brown - Hennsey County Human Services
 John Mundy - Aphilex Industries
 Phil Brooks - Unemployment Income Deputy Commissioner
 Ling Chen - Community College Counselor
 Todd Flannigan - VP/Aquila Optics
 Darlene Parker - Workforce Investment Board Director
 Stella Hennepin - Commissioner, DRED
 Anya Petrova - Public Administration Professor
 Keisha Moore - Graduate Student
 Pa Foua Lee - Graduate Student
 Daniel Fisher - Graduate Student
 Kim Cohen - One-Stop Manager (Workforce Investment Act)
 Nathan Williams - One-Stop Manager (Unemployment Insurance/ Dept. of Employment and Training)
 Lydia Robbins - One-Stop Manager (Office of Disability Management)
 Hugo Cabrera - Riverbend City Resident
 Philippe Polynice - Riverbend City Resident
 Amber Salazar - Riverbend City Resident

SCENE 1: ONE-STOP CENTER

Expository Text: The Workforce Investment Board convenes in the Ruby Lake Neighborhood One-Stop Center to discuss strategies for better serving the neighborhood's employment crisis.

Dialogue 01: Darlene Parker, director of the Workforce Investment Board, begins the meeting.

DARLENE:

Hello, Workforce Investment Board members, and welcome to this important meeting at the Ruby Lake Neighborhood One-Stop Center. As you know, the city recently conducted a needs assessment in this neighborhood, and one of the most serious problems the city identified was the impact of unemployment and underemployment on this neighborhood.

The rate of unemployment was no surprise to any of us. But what this report really brought to light was how badly this neighborhood has been affected by the loss of manufacturing jobs. An alarming percentage of people in this community are significantly worse off economically now than they were five years ago. What's more, the unemployment rate of individuals in the 16 to 25-year-old range in this neighborhood is the highest in the city.

We're here today to discuss ways that the Workforce Investment Board and this one-stop center can better meet the employment needs of this neighborhood. The current state of employment in this neighborhood does not reflect the level of service we have been mandated to provide by the Workforce Investment Act.

I am happy to say that I've had several promising conversations in the last few days that may lead to an innovative strategy. Traditional manufacturing jobs are leaving Riverbend City, and that's a serious problem. But on the flip side, companies that need workers for advanced hi-tech manufacturing positions are becoming increasingly common. If we could find a way to identify good candidates in this neighborhood for advanced manufacturing jobs, and then provide these workers the training they need, we might be able to reduce the unemployment rate significantly. Of course, fiscal responsibility is one of our primary concerns, so it's imperative that we balance innovation with fiscal responsibility.

I'd like to turn the meeting over to Phil Brooks. Phil is going to tell us more about the unemployment problem in the Ruby Lake neighborhood.

Dialogue 02: Phil Brooks, the Unemployment Income Deputy Commissioner, discusses the unemployment problem in the Ruby Lake neighborhood.

PHIL:

The unemployment crisis in this neighborhood is a fairly recent phenomenon. About a decade ago, the Ruby Lake neighborhood was in transition from a traditionally Polish neighborhood to a primarily Latino neighborhood. The influx of Latinos into this neighborhood was fueled in part by this neighborhood's proximity to good manufacturing jobs. Ten years ago, Riverbend City was still home to a number of large manufacturing companies. By far, the biggest employer in this part of town was the Schneider Chemical Company.

Unfortunately, in recent years, manufacturing jobs have evaporated from Riverbend City. The Schneider Chemical Company left Riverbend City three years ago. That's pretty much the story of how this neighborhood went from being a good place for working class people to live and work to where we are today.

STELLA:

Phil, I'm not all that familiar with Schneider. Why did they leave?

PHIL:

Why do you think? They built plants in Mexico and Singapore. Schneider also closed down plants in Kentucky and upstate New York.

STELLA:

Ah, I figured. There's a story we've heard before, huh?

DARLENE:

It certainly is. Phil, can you speak to the issue of youth unemployment?

PHIL:

Well, youth unemployment in Ruby Lake is the highest in Riverbend City. Specifically, I'm referring to the 16-25 year-old range. Unfortunately, that's pretty typical in a neighborhood dominated by ethnic minorities. Unemployment is high all over the city right now, especially for young people. When that's the case, it's even harder for young people who are minorities to compete for available jobs. That kind of discrimination is subtle and rarely explicit, but it's certainly a factor.

STELLA:

And it's also harder for kids to compete when they don't graduate from high school. The graduation rate in this neighborhood is significantly lower than the city's average. Seems to me that the unemployment problem in this neighborhood may be contributing to the dropout rate. If kids see their older brothers and sisters graduating from school without finding jobs, they've got to wonder: why should I even bother with high school?

PHIL:

Absolutely, Stella. And if kids felt like they had a good job waiting for them in the future, maybe other neighborhood problems would improve—like teen pregnancy and gang activity.

Dialogue 03: WIB members discuss the possibility of training workers for advanced manufacturing jobs.

TODD:

Hi, everyone. I'm new here, and a few of you don't know me. My name is Todd Flannigan, and I'm a vice president at Aquila Optics. We've been in business for about seven years now, and we've recently relocated to Riverbend City. I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve on the Workforce Investment Board. I'm also hoping that Aquila Optics can be part of the solution to the unemployment problem in this neighborhood and throughout the city.

DARLENE:

Todd, can you tell the board more about Aquila Optics—and about advanced manufacturing jobs in general?

TODD:

Sure. Well, in a nutshell, Aquila manufactures components that are essential for both commercial and military aircraft. We're a classic example of what you call advanced manufacturing. Traditional manufacturing jobs involve people working with large equipment on assembly lines and creating large products—like cars, or vats of chemicals. At Aquila, we create small components that that require specialized precision. We need people who know how to build things accurately on the microscopic level.

LING:

And that's where this program comes in, I assume? Hi, Todd, my name is Ling Chen. I'm the Dean of the School of Technology at Riverwood Community College. My guess is that you're going to tell us that there aren't enough people in this city with the advanced manufacturing skills you need?

TODD:

That's absolutely correct, Ling. And Aquila isn't the only company in town that needs workers. This is a case where there are plenty of jobs out there and not enough workers with the right skill set.

DARLENE:

Ling, do you think Riverwood Community College could partner with Aquila Optics in a pilot program to train workers?

LING:

That sounds like a realistic option. I know that in similar programs, workers who take training classes at a community college can count these credits towards an associate degree. Will this be the case here?

DARLENE:

I hope so. We would certainly like to help get workers on the path to a college degree.

LING:

I also assume you'd like the community college to help out with the assessment of prospective candidates for this program. Could you tell me more about how this assessment will work? Are you interested in factors like high school GPA, math skills, job history...?

TODD:

Well, there are several industry standard evaluation exams. These exams ask questions about all of the things you mentioned. The exams also measure skills and aptitudes needed to be successful in advanced manufacturing.

LING:

What happens after someone passes the test?

PHIL:

Applicants who do well enough on the test will be invited to an interview. The interview panel will include Kim Cohen, the one-stop center manager that specializes in Workforce Investment Board matters. There will also be a rep from the company and a rep from the community college on the interview panel.

LING:

And how many people make it through the evaluation and the interview?

TODD:

It depends. But typically, around 25 to 30 percent.

LING:

This sounds promising. Of course, this won't solve all of the unemployment problems in this neighborhood, especially since the majority of people who take the assessment won't be accepted into the training program. And I assume that we're talking about entry-level jobs here?

TODD:

That's right. We're talking in the range of \$10 to \$15 an hour. Plus Aquila will offer these workers the same benefits package that the rest of our employees get, which includes vacation pay and excellent health care benefits.

LING:

Like I said, that won't solve all of our unemployment problems. But it's certainly a move in the right direction.

Dialogue 04: The WIB members discuss next steps.

STELLA:

Well, I certainly hear a lot of enthusiasm in this room for a pilot training program in advanced manufacturing. People in this neighborhood have suffered because the manufacturing skills they have are no longer needed. This sounds like a strategy that addresses the core issues. But how do we move forward from here?

DARLENE:

Good question, Stella. We're talking about a pilot program, and we certainly hope the pilot program will be successful and will get replicated throughout the city. We have the funds for the pilot program. But I want to reiterate the importance of fiscal responsibility. If we're going to replicate the program, the pilot has to be a measurable success.

PHIL:

Ah. So how do we measure our results? Should we find someone to conduct a program evaluation?

DARLENE:

Yes, but not just when the program is completed. What we need is someone to work with us from day one. We need someone to research relevant literature and to analyze the results of the program at various intervals. It needs to be someone with a strong background in employment issues, so we may need to go out of state to find an appropriate individual.

LING:

Not necessarily, Darlene. This sounds like a perfect project for Anya Petrova at Beck University. She's a public administration professor who specializes in employment issues. We've had her come out to Riverwood Community College a number of times to speak to students.

PHIL:

I know Dr. Petrova too. If she's available, she may be just what we need.

DARLENE:

Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. I'll get in touch with her right away. Like I said, we do have funding for the pilot project, and that would include funding for Dr. Petrova and probably some research assistants.

PHIL:

Great! Sounds like a plan.

Scene Complete.

Optional Content: Documents on desktop

DANIEL:

Dr. Petrova, can you tell us more about what we're going to be measuring at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals?

ANYA:

Well, Daniel, once the workers have been assessed and accepted into the program, they'll be interviewed every 30 days. Based on these interviews, we'll collect data about wages, employment retention, and worker progress. After we analyze this data, we'll present it to the Workforce Investment Board. But right now, that's just FYI. You're going to be plenty busy in the next few weeks helping me with the literature map.

Dialogue 06: The graduate assistants ask about employment research.

KEISHA:

Dr. Petrova, I'm really excited about getting started! It sounds like we've got a lot of work to do though. Can you tell us more about the information we need for the literature map?

PA FOUA:

And can you also give us some starting places for our research? I've never done research on employment issues.

ANYA:

Sure. Well, an excellent place to start is at the Bureau of Labor Statistics website at www.bls.gov. That's where to gather background information about employment in Riverbend City and in the state. You can search by area and region to find out more about wages, labor force statistics, employment projections, and just about anything else you need to know about employment issues. There's also a comprehensive set of Bureau of Labor Statistics articles on the site, so be sure to search for relevant articles.

DANIEL:

I actually just used that website. I wrote a paper about layoffs in my hometown, and there's a huge section on the site about mass layoff statistics. Maybe we could look at that to see what it says about Riverbend City layoffs.

ANYA:

That's a good idea, Daniel. Another good place to start with is the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration website. That's at www.doleta.gov. This is a good place to search for relevant case studies. Once we locate case studies, we can investigate them further. We'll probably want to contact some of the stakeholders who worked on these sample programs directly.

KEISHA:

Dr. Petrova, will we be relying mostly on government data? Or will peer-reviewed journals and other academic research also be important?

ANYA:

Oh, of course we'll want to look at scholarly research as well. The peer-reviewed journal to start with is the Journal of Workforce Development. That's a publication of the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals. You'll also want to look at their website for papers and other resources. Also, check out the Journal of Labor Research and the Labor Studies Journal. We'll want to include a section in the literature map about program theory and impact analysis.

KEISHA:

Thanks! That gives us a good idea on where to get started.

Dialogue 07: Dr. Petrova discusses focus groups with Pa Foua.

PA FOUA:

Dr. Petrova, can you tell us more about the focus groups?

ANYA:

Of course. Pa Foua, I understand you have focus group experience.

PA FOUA:

I do. Most recently, I conducted a series of focus groups for Riverbend City Medical Center. I interviewed people in the Hmong community about their experiences with the hospital.

ANYA:

I'm so happy to hear that. Would you be interested in conducting some of the focus groups for this project?

PA FOUA:

Sure! Who do want me to interview?

ANYA:

Well, we'll be conducting two kinds of small focus group interviews. First, we want to hear from the Ruby Lake neighborhood one-stop center managers. At this point in the action research process, our goal is to gather information that can be used to help design the projected intervention—in this case, the pilot employment program. There are some questions we need to ask the managers to find out how to best conduct the program.

PA FOUA:

Such as?

ANYA:

We need to know if the managers have experience conducting industry-specific evaluations. These evaluations are being used to identify prospective candidates for the program. If the managers haven't worked with these before, then we'll probably conduct the assessments at the community college. We also need to know if they have experience training workers for soft skills related issues.

PA FOUA:

Okay. So other than the managers, who are we interviewing?

ANYA:

We're also going to be interviewing workers in the Ruby Lake neighborhood who might be candidates for this program. The Workforce Investment Board is concerned that they might have misconceptions about advanced manufacturing, so we want to hear their impressions.

PA FOUA:

I have experience doing interviews with community members. Perhaps I can interview the workers?

ANYA:

That's a distinct possibility. In the meantime, we need to recruit appropriate focus group participants. I'll contact Nathan Williams, a manager down at the one-stop center, to talk about recruitment strategies. We may be able to offer the workers who participate a small stipend. Daniel and Keisha, I may need you to make some phone calls to assist with the recruitment. Pa Foua, I'd like to set up a meeting with you to work on developing a set of guiding questions for the worker interviews.

PA FOUA:

Sure. I'm happy to help.

Scene Complete.

Optional Content: Documents on desktop

Action Research Inquiry Cycle.pdf

Plain English WIA.pdf

SCENE 3: ONE-STOP CENTER

Expository Text: At Ruby Lake Elementary School, Dr. Anya Petrova conducts small focus groups with the one-stop managers. Graduate assistant Pa Foua Lee conducts focus groups with unemployed and underemployed workers in the Ruby Lake neighborhood. The focus group transcripts will be analyzed, and this data will inform the design of the pilot program.

Dialogue 08: Listen to a portion of one of Dr. Petrova's focus group interviews with one-stop center managers.

ANYA:

The Workforce Investment Board is going to be conducting industry-specific evaluations to assess potential participants. Do any of you have training or experience doing these kinds of evaluations?

NATHAN:

Um...what are they? Like Likert-scale exams?

LYDIA:

I'm pretty sure the answer to that question is no, Dr. Petrova. I'm sorry.

KIM:

Yeah. I don't have that kind of experience either. And those kinds of evaluations are expensive, right? I hear that they can run about \$50 per person.

LYDIA:

Is it possible for us to get training to conduct the evaluations? I'm always up for learning new skills.

KIM:

Me too. But if we have to pay for training on top of \$50 per exam, how are we going to pull that off?

This mission illustrates the planning phase of an employment retraining program. In the Ruby Lake neighborhood of Riverbend City, unemployment and underemployment are high because traditional manufacturing jobs have been leaving the city. In response, the Workforce Information Board meets to discuss how they can better serve the employment needs of the neighborhood—as per the mandate of the Workforce Investment Act. A WIB proposes a strategy: a pilot training program to transition qualified workers into advanced manufacturing jobs at a local company. To evaluate the program, the WIB enlists the help of Dr. Anya Petrova, a public administration professor. She briefs her three graduate assistants on how to locate the appropriate background information. Then, in preparation to designing the program, focus groups are conducted with one-stop center managers and with prospective program participants.

THEMES:

This mission illustrates the first phase of the Action Research Inquiry Cycle—Plan for Research and Address the Problem." The three scenes in the mission illustrate the three steps of this first phase: (1) assessing the core issues, (2) reviewing the literature, and (3) designing the projected intervention. The course competencies that align with this mission are:

- Lead to improve public administration.
- Create efficacy in public administration strategies.

RESOURCES:

- Action Research Inquiry Cycle
- Workforce Investment Board Members
- Workforce Investment act
- Plain English WIA
- Ruby Lake Needs Assessment Executive Report

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Action Research Inquiry Cycle



