



## RVA Thrives Summer 2017 Survey Findings: Digging Deeper

In our last post we started to unpack the results from the community engagement survey last summer. In it we heard from several residents who talked about the struggles residents face, the lack of resources available to them, and what they want to see changed. As a recap, the top issues identified by the community are:

- Neighborhood Cleanup (42 percent)
- Affordable Housing (28 percent)
- Job training and job opportunities (24 percent)
- Lack of food access (24 percent)
- Feeling safe in my neighborhood (24 percent)

Last time we explored the idea that community residents want to clean up the neighborhood to cultivate community pride, encourage economic and civic investment, and foster connections between neighbors. For them, a clean and maintained community is a means to a larger goal of a vibrant and connected neighborhood, not the end in itself.

In this post we're going to dig deeper into the survey results by looking at the needs of families and end by talking about community pride.

### **Families with children face similar struggles as those without children**

One thing that surprised us was that the needs of children--childcare for preschool kids and after-school programs--were some of the least chosen challenges. When asked to identify the greatest challenges in the community, the majority of respondents had chosen something other than accessing quality and affordable childcare for children of all ages. Since the survey was given to any community member--young and old, living alone and in families-- we decided to look more closely at the challenges faced by families.

Of the residents answering the survey roughly 2 out of 5 (44 percent) lived in households with children younger than 18 years. These individuals were slightly more likely to identify a need for after-school programs or childcare for preschool kids as an important challenge in the community (about 4-5 percentage points higher), but their overall ranking was similar to other adults. The top four challenges for families were the same as the community as a whole:

- Neighborhood Cleanup (42 percent)
- Affordable housing (28 percent)
- Job training and job opportunities (24 percent)
- Lack of food access (24 percent)
- After-school programs (22 percent)
- Feeling safe in my neighborhood (19 percent)

While families with children are more likely than families without children to identify childcare and after-school programs as important challenges on the Cowardin-Jefferson Davis Corridor, they still see the same overarching challenges as other adults. A clean neighborhood, a stable job, affordable housing, and access to healthy food are daily challenges for families with kids and families without kids alike.

Just as all families--regardless of the presence of children--see similar challenges in the community, they also see important strengths in which they take pride.

### **Community residents are proud of many things in their community.**

Last week we explored that one of the motivating factors for wanting to clean up the neighborhood was the desire to take pride in their community. However, it would be a mistake to assume that these residents don't already have a strong sense of pride in and connection to the people and places where they live. The desire to clean up is about, in part, ensuring the appearance of the streets and houses doesn't detract from the strength of the community.

When we talked to people in living in the Jefferson-Davis Corridor, they stressed that there are many things in their community worth celebrating, but that these things were often overshadowed by the perception that the community was dangerous, run-down, or neglected. One resident, who lived in the community 37 years, wished that the larger Richmond community could see the value in the South Side and the changes that were happening:

*I'm most proud of a lot of the community activities that go on. Far as National Night Out, or some of the card clubs, the bike clubs that come around and do different things with the community. Around holidays the Feed More food bank, they come around all the time.... [I'm proud of it] Because it shows that the community is changing. A lot of much needed help far as*

*helping families and far as food and schooling and job preparation, helping people get their proper identification straight. All that good stuff like that.*

For this resident, there is much to celebrate that is often overlooked, and shows the great potential in the community. For another resident, who moved to the community 3 years ago, the Jefferson-Davis Corridor is a haven compared to other neighborhoods:

*It's been a good experience living in this neighborhood compared to living in other neighborhoods. I believe it's a good community to live in....Some people are actually kind, positive people, and then you've got some people who have a negative aspect on life because of what they were dealing with in their past.*

While this resident acknowledges that some of the people in the community are struggling with issues from their past, which spills over into the community, overall the community, which is made up of its people, is a good place to call home.

Taking a cue from these residents, the survey asked respondents to identify the two "greatest strengths" in their community. They responded:

- "Friendly people and neighbors" (38 percent)
- "The community's potential for change" (33 percent)
- "How long people have lived in the neighborhood" (26 percent)
- "The way people stick together and help each other" (23 percent)
- "The history of the community" (21 percent)
- "The community's potential for change" (20 percent)
- "The diversity -- racial, ethnic, immigrant, sexual-- of the people" (17 percent)

Their responses, where no one item outshines the others, indicates that people see a variety of strengths in the community rather than one or two things that everyone mentions. This reflects the rich variety of people--young and old, families and single people, long-time residents and those who recently moved to the corridor--that make up the communities along the Jefferson-Davis Corridor.