

# BUILDING SOCIAL CAPACITY TO ADDRESS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS AND REDUCE INCARCERATION IN UNDERSERVED CHICAGO COMMUNITIES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The following report summarizes the key findings from a research project titled *Building Social Capacity to Address Behavioral Health Needs and Reduce Incarceration in Underserved Chicago Communities*, awarded to the Smart Decarceration Project at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, funded by the University of Chicago Women’s Board.

Individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and have little access to behavioral health treatment services. Rates of mental illness and substance abuse among incarcerated people are three to seven times higher than in the general public.<sup>12</sup> And despite the overwhelming need for treatment behind bars, less than 10% of incarcerated people with behavioral health disorders receive evidence-based treatment before, during, or after incarceration.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this study was to develop and pilot test a social capacity assessment tool (SoCAT) to better meet the behavioral health treatment needs of people with criminal justice involvement in Austin and Washington Park, two high-incarceration neighborhoods within the City of Chicago.

To guide this research project, a Community Advisory Board (CAB) was assembled representing key stakeholders who live or work in the Austin and Washington Park neighborhoods and are familiar with the various challenges facing these two underserved communities. Thirteen people participated in at least one of seven CAB meetings over the course of eight months to inform the development of the SoCAT instrument and review the results. Members of the CAB included service providers, members of law-enforcement, representatives of other community organizations or institutions, and people with lived experience in the criminal justice system.

CAB members identified 40 survey respondents who live, work, or worship in the Austin and Washington Park communities. Members of the research team administered the surveys during a nine week period from March to May 2019.

The results of the surveys were presented in one final CAB meeting in each community, during which the CAB members reviewed responses and indicated what information they found to be most valuable to their communities.

## Data from the SoCAT Pilot-Survey in Austin and Washington Park

The SoCAT instrument aimed to measure the existing and potential social capacity of a community to generate and sustain adequate responses to the behavioral health needs of its residents and thereby reducing the use of incarceration. In this context, social capacity is defined as “local power and local resources mobilized to respond to local issues.” The survey aimed to measure this through two key components: 1. Mapping assets/Local Resources and 2. Mapping power by examining the power of social connections.

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<sup>1</sup> Peters, Roger H., Harry K. Wexler, Arthur J. Lurigio, “Co-Occurring Substance Use and Mental Disorders in the Criminal Justice System: A new Frontier of Clinical Practice and Research,” *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* Vol. 38, No 1 (2015): 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> “Health, Mental Health, and Substance Use Disorders,” *The Council of State Governments*. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/substance-abuse/faqs/#q2>

<sup>3</sup> Chandler, Redonna K., Bennett W. Fletcher and Nora D. Volkow. “Treating Drug Abuse and Addiction in the Criminal Justice System: Improving Public Health and Safety.” *Journal of the American Medical Association* Vol. 301, No 2 (2009): 183-190.

Forty survey respondents completed the SoCAT instrument, consisting of 20 people who live, work, and/or worship in Washington Park and 20 people who live, work and/or worship in Austin. Respondents represented faith leaders, behavioral health service providers, re-entry services, volunteers, recipients of behavioral health and/or other social services, and people with the lived experience of having a criminal justice background. Thirty-seven survey respondents identified as African American. Half of the survey respondents identified as male and the other half identified as female. The majority of respondents had completed high school-level education and most were between the ages of 40–70.

### 1. Mapping Assets / Local Resources

The SoCAT defined local assets within five categories: Individual, Institutional, Organizational, Cultural, and Physical.<sup>4</sup> Based on their knowledge, respondents were asked to identify the existence of these assets in their respective communities. Highlights from these responses are below:

#### Institutional and Organizational Assets

	Austin	Washington Park
Substance Abuse Treatment	65%	20%
Mental Health Services	30%	15%
Violence Prevention	65%	25%
Employment	45%	20%
Reentry Support Groups	55%	10%
Block Clubs	60%	45%
Education Groups	60%	25%
Youth Groups	45%	60%
Survivor Groups	65%	10%

#### Most-Identified Institutional and Organizational Assets-

The assets that were most identified by respondents varied in the two communities.

Austin		Washington Park	
Addiction prevention and recovery groups	65%	Food Pantries	80%
Violence Prevention Coalitions	65%	Youth Groups	60%
Community Violence Support Groups	65%	Afterschool programs	50%

#### Least-Identified Institutional and Organizational Assets-

There were four of the same resources in both communities that were least identifiable.

	Austin	Washington Park
Family reunification supports	5%	0%
Substance abuse treatment for juvenile/youth	10%	5%

<sup>4</sup> "An Asset-Based Framework to Explore Your Project" in *Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organizations Capacity*, Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University, p15. Accessed: <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/kelloggabcd.pdf>

Treatment for PCP use	10%	0%
Living wage jobs	10%	5%

### Cultural Assets

The cultural asset in Austin most identified were cultural commodities in the form of restaurants, whereas the cultural asset in Washington Park most identified was faith-based organizations.

	Austin	Washington Park
Faith based organization	50%	75%
Arts Organization	35%	50%
Heritage marker or institution	25%	20%
Cultural Commodities (mostly restaurants)	60%	35%

### Physical Assets

The most identified physical assets in both communities included parks, vacant lots, vacant buildings and public transportation. The physical assets that were the least identified by respondents varied in the two communities, although very few people identified safe housing in BOTH the communities.

MOST-IDENTIFIED		
	Austin	Washington Park
Vacant Lots	70%	75%
Vacant buildings	65%	70%
Sufficient Public Transportation	60%	70%
Parks	40%	75%

LEAST-IDENTIFIED			
AUSTIN		WASHINGTON PARK	
Safe housing that is up to code	15%	Safe housing that is up to code	30%
Urban Gardens	20%	Clean air	20%
Commercial buildings	25%	Water access (lake, river)	25%
Streets in Good Condition	25%	Clean drinking water	25%

## 2. Power Mapping

The next section of the SoCAT instrument, *Power Mapping*, sought to measure the second component of social capacity that we defined-local power, which is conceptualized as the ability of a group of neighborhood residents to make changes in the area they live. The questions focused on three dimensions of local power: sense of belonging and connection, willingness to respond, and helping each other out.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Questions and indicators were copied and/or adapted from different sections of *Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influences Among Youths*, [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv\\_compendium.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv_compendium.pdf)

### Belonging and Connection

A majority of survey respondents in both communities generally agreed or strongly agreed with statements that would indicate they felt a sense of belonging and connection to their respective neighborhood.

<i>Respondents that agreed or strongly agreed that they:</i>	Austin	Washington Park
<b>Regularly stop and talk with people in the neighborhood</b>	80%	85%
<b>Know most of the names of people on their block</b>	65%	75%
<b>Feel like they belong</b>	75%	60%
<b>Feel loyal to people in their neighborhood</b>	85%	60%
<b>Are willing to work together with others on something to improve the neighborhood</b>	85%	95%
<b>Feel like they are similar to other residents</b>	80%	60%
<b>Would like to move out of the neighborhood if given the opportunity</b>	55%	15%
<i>Respondents agreed that they:</i>	<i>Austin</i>	<i>Washington Park</i>
<b>Feel like they have almost no influence over what their block is like</b>	40%	30%
<b>Feel like if there is a problem on their block, people who live there can get it solved</b>	50%	55%
<b>Feel like their neighbors want the same thing for their block</b>	60%	70%
<b>Feel at home on their block</b>	55%	65%

### Willingness to Respond

Respondents were asked how willing they would be to respond to an issue in their neighborhood. “Respond” could mean making a phone call, raising the issue at a community meeting, intervening at the time of the incident, etc. The only instance where a majority of respondents WOULD get involved was in Washington Park, where 85% of respondents said they would respond in the case of physical fighting in front of a house.

	Austin	Washington Park
Truant youth	30%	25%
Graffiti	30%	30%
Physical fighting	40%	85%
Budget cuts affecting public services	45%	50%

## Helping Each Other Out

Respondents were asked how often people in their neighborhood help each other out.

- In Austin, In situations such as doing favors, hosting gatherings, watching over property, or asking advice, at least 30% of respondents replied “Often”
- In Washington Park, in the same situations, at least 25% replied “very often” or “often”, 30% replied “Sometimes.”

## Insights from the CAB

A summary of findings was presented to the CAB members in June 2019 to aid in the interpretation of results. CAB members found the survey results to provide a few indications:

- In both communities, there were high levels of social connectedness, belonging, and identification among survey respondents. CAB members suggested this collective power has the potential to address social issues in the neighborhood.
- In both communities, CAB members felt that there were low levels of awareness around existing resources in their respective communities that support residents with behavioral health needs and/or criminal justice contact.
- Austin CAB members suggested that social service providers and community groups should conduct more outreach and public education around the resources they offer.
- Washington Park CAB members suggested that results from such a tool would be helpful for social service agencies to gauge knowledge of services and interest in participating in new efforts.

## Lessons learned about the tool

- There was confusion among respondents around the individual asset section.
- There was confusion among respondents between the difference between institutional and organizational resources.
- Respondents who were asked to give their opinion of the survey after completion cited concerns about the tool’s length. Several respondents also expressed that they could not remember the names of the assets that they identified. Future revisions to the tool will carefully consider the time it took our 40 survey respondents to complete the tool and also how to better organize the assets which are presented to respondents.

## Conclusion

In this study we developed a social capacity assessment tool (SoCAT) to better meet the behavioral health treatment needs of people with criminal justice involvement. We obtained input from CAB members, who represented our two target communities, and then pilot tested the SoCAT with a total of forty people. To our knowledge, this study represents the first effort at quantifying social capacity needs and strengths at the community level in an effort to create data that could guide the development of tailored community-level interventions designed specifically to build social capacity and reduce the use of incarceration.