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### Contextualizing Kindergarten Readiness Data: A Qualitative Research Study of Forest Park Neighborhood in Spartanburg, South Carolina

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**Contextualizing Kindergarten Readiness Data:  
A Qualitative Research Study of Forest Park Neighborhood in  
Spartanburg, South Carolina**

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# **Contextualizing Kindergarten Readiness Data: A Qualitative Research Study of Forest Park Neighborhood in Spartanburg, South Carolina**

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## **1. Project Background**

This project was undertaken as a result of conversations initiated by members of the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM) about the desirability of qualitative data to contextualize quantitative data generated by the use of a validated national instrument in Spartanburg County Schools. SAM is a nonprofit and community movement that facilitates the discussion of shared information and intentional, collaborative, and strategic work by cross-sector partnerships in order to foster high levels of academic attainment for all children in Spartanburg County. As part of data-gathering efforts by SAM, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) was implemented to gather data about kindergarten readiness first in Spartanburg School District 7, then in 2017, across all seven Spartanburg County school districts. The EDI is a validated, population-based measure of early child development in five key domains (physical health, emotional maturity, social competence, language and cognitive skills, and communications skills and general knowledge).<sup>1</sup> Kindergarten teachers respond to the questions on the EDI for each child in a kindergarten class.

EDI efforts in Spartanburg are part of a national initiative, Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems (TECCS), which is itself a partnership between the UCLA Center for Healthier Children and United Way Worldwide. Following the administration of the EDI countywide, UCLA/TECCS conducted analysis of countywide data and provided analysis to SAM in census tract form so that data could be understood and presented visually as place-based data. SAM staff members shared the EDI data with numerous community groups, and based upon the desire of community leaders within particular census tracts, SAM selected geographical areas of focus for our research. These census tracts were selected primarily because of the interest of community leaders in the neighborhoods in taking next steps for improving outcomes. These tracts are 210.01 (the Forest Park neighborhood) and 208 (the Highland neighborhood). Both are neighborhoods on the Southside, and children from each attend Spartanburg School District 7.

The community-engaged qualitative research conducted by our team in 2019 offers contextualization of the EDI data for these two census tracts in the City of Spartanburg. This report shares the data from census tract 210.01, the Forest Park neighborhood.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthychild.ucla.edu/pages/edi>

While census data and the other limited quantitative data available give a sense of community demographics, this large-scale picture does not reveal why the data looks the way it does; how community members experience opportunities and disparities; and how community members express their needs and aspirations. Organizations working to co-create solutions to challenges do not have the capacity to elicit qualitative data that highlights individual situations and narratives, particularly at the census tract level. In combination with quantitative data, the qualitative research in this report is intended to: a) help community partners and researchers develop better, more informed next steps, shaped by voices within identified communities; b) provide better cultural context for community organizations to be able to do their work inclusively and effectively.

## **2. Top-Line Analysis**

Long-time community residents have labored together to create a Forest Park that is a place of pride and a reserve of strength. The data we have gathered suggests the neighborhood is at an inflection point: it will either persist and change led by homeowners in collaboration with others (inside and outside of the neighborhood), or its status as a thriving majority Black community in the City of Spartanburg will erode.

The sense of agency, initiative, and collaborative problem-solving in Forest Park is a powerful community asset, not just for the neighborhood but for the City as a whole. Memory, anchored in physical environment, gives long-time community members a sense of history that is a reserve of strength in the service of resilience and persistence. Their agency and memory have powered educational attainment of multiple generations. Furthermore, youth express appreciation for the care they see from elders, and elders express a desire to invest in youth. At times, older residents make considerable personal efforts to see that youth are connected to opportunity. These efforts point to a need for decision-makers in organizations to close the gap, so that the burden of accessing opportunity is not solely on the caring older adult.

Long-time residents are very aware of newcomers to the neighborhood. They observe changes in demographics both neutrally (with regard to the ethnic/racial composition of the neighborhood) and negatively (with regard to renters). Residents identify a connection between more transient residents (renters) and problems expressed socially (screaming at children) and in physical space (litter). Further study should be done to understand the lived realities of children and families in precarious and transient situations, as interviewee data suggests they move across neighborhoods. This work will be important because though neighborhoods have fixed geographical boundaries, people move across them over the course of their lives and days. In order to address challenges of children and families in neighborhoods of minoritized populations (such as Forest Park, Highland, and the Northside, all named explicitly by respondents in our two focus areas as places where they live or have lived their lives), it will be important to understand neighborhoods in relationship to one another, and to the City and County context as a whole, and to build a shared understanding together with residents.

### **3. Methodology**

There were two primary methods for gathering data:

1. phenomenological observations by researchers as participant-observers or bystander-observers in community spaces;
2. semi-structured interviews by researchers with community members (ages 18 and older) to elicit narratives around questions such as:
  - What is an ordinary day like for you (and/or your family) living in Forest Park?
  - What do you like about Forest Park?
  - What do you wish were different?

All observations and the majority of interviews took place in the summer months when most schools were out of session. Data from observations and interviews were analyzed using established qualitative methods,<sup>2</sup> and this written report was prepared from that analysis. All names of individuals have been changed to preserve anonymity. The report and findings are being shared with community collaborators whose interest sparked the project and will shape further research.

### **4. Major Themes Identified in the Data**

The following themes consistently emerged from the observation and interview data, and these themes serve as the organizing structure of this report.

#### **Interactions**

##### **Inside the neighborhood**

Older adults

Adult-Child/Youth; Child-Child; Adult-Adult

##### **With decision-makers, systems, and built environments**

What is working

Gaps

Differences of opinion: Policing

#### **Change**

**Change identified as positive:** crime decreased, inter-community networking increased

**Change identified as negative:** properties managed by property management and occupied by renters (associated with transience); affordability of new constructions

**Change phrased neutrally:** racial / ethnic composition of neighborhood

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<sup>2</sup> Heideggerian hermeneutic analysis

## **Social relationships and place: co-creation in neighborhood context**

### **Physical environment**

In general

At neighborhood edges

In the heart of the neighborhood

### **Agency & social capital**

### **Multigenerational mapping onto place**

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## **Interactions**

### **Interactions inside the neighborhood**

#### Interactions among and with older adults

Our research team's observations across a variety of days of the week and times of day revealed the frequent presence of older adults in outdoor and community spaces, not necessarily interacting: "In the small neighborhood adjacent to the C. C. Woodson area, there are no children around, however there is an older person in the yard or on the porch at almost every house." On a Wednesday morning: "The people that we see within the neighborhood are mostly older except for the kids at camp at the Woodson Center. Of the older adults, nearly all of them are dressed up like they are going out." On a Thursday morning:

On almost every house [on Bomar], there are chairs on the porch. These chairs are old-school purple chairs with three lines going down the back of the chairs. These school chairs have dark stains, and some have their legs bent or missing. On the porches, there are also old dark brown sofas. These sofas look very old and used. On these chairs and sofas there are older people sitting down, at times talking or simply just looking into the distance.

Casual, relaxed, familiar interactions were commonly observed, among the older community members, between generations, and interacting with our research team. On a Wednesday morning:

Upon observing the Liberty Square housing units, there are many older people sitting on chairs, sofas, and various other pieces of furniture. A few people smoke cigarettes, but almost all of them are conversing with those on the porch with them and others across the street. When we drive through, many stare and remain stone-faced, but a few people give us smiles and waves which we return.

A Friday at noon:

One house has an older woman and two dogs sitting outside in the sun. She smiles and waves as I drive past and we both watch the dogs run around the front yard... The next street over, a young man and older woman sit outside dressed in business casual ... and sitting in the sun conversing. Two houses down from them, three older women sit outside on the covered front porch on lawn chairs and talk. They laugh and smile.

And on a Monday morning: “As I walk down the street I see a pair of older individuals, a man and a woman, walking on the sidewalk on the left hand side of the road, at the crest of the hill. They are walking downhill past a sign for Forest Park. They appear to be talking to one another.”

Our research team also had a chance to observe interactions with older adults at the neighborhood association meeting:

Before the meeting starts, an older woman approaches the police officer and voices a complaint about noise down the street from her in the middle of the night... As the older Black community members file in, each one asks the officers and their fellow neighbors if they are in the right place.

### Adult-child and child-child interactions

It was fairly common for our observations to include older adults with children and sometimes with younger adults as well. On a Saturday afternoon:

I see another group of two adults and one child. The child appears to be about five years old or a little younger. It appears that one person is leaving. One woman is walking toward the vehicle, and the other woman and the child stay in the driveway. From their appearances, I surmise them to perhaps be three different generations: the older, heavier woman is walking toward the car, and the other woman is younger, and she is with the child. The adults appear to be talking to one another.

On a Thursday afternoon: “We now move out of the neighborhood and wave at the elderly women that gaze at us, and they all wave back in a kind manner. We see more children outside of their houses; there are no toys, just children sitting on the porches.” And on a Tuesday afternoon:

An older woman walks into the meeting with three children who seem to be her grandchildren. The children hurry to the side of the meeting room where there is a table and chairs for them to sit .... They leave and return to the room constantly, once returning with a small juice in a carton and snacks.

It was also common to see multiple adults of a variety of ages conversing while looking after children or interacting across generations in public spaces. On a Saturday afternoon:

I see that there are three people near a one-story house; in front of it are two adults and one child. From the height I would imagine the child to be five years or younger. One adult, a woman in a dark blue t-shirt, faces outward, standing just in front of the deck rail. The other adult is with the child in the yard. The adult and child appear to be about to get into a car, saying something to the woman on the deck as they do so.

On a weekday late afternoon:

We begin to see signs about a Forest Park neighborhood meeting happening at 5:30pm. The more we drive around, the more signs we see. There are more adults outside. Many are in their cars with their children, parked in the shade.



And at the C. C. Woodson Center, an interview participant reported, such interactions are common. Benjamin, who works at the Center, told us, “Usually [the Center] will have little outings up there and just let kids have fun and parents will be there and everyone is just having fun and being able to communicate and stuff like that.” The research team’s observations supplement this picture:

As we play basketball [in the C. C. Woodson gym at 3:30 PM on a weekday] I notice the setup of six hoops. The gym appears small but spacious enough. Teenage boys come in and begin playing in the space beside us. More teenage boys come in forming teams to play against each other. I notice a family who all get together and play on the farthest court in the corner. Besides the father of the family and another man who comes in that also appears middle age, everyone else is young. All the people we can see appear to be Black. There are about 25 people in the gym playing basketball.

Outside the Center, during morning drop-off for summer camp and programs, our research team observed:

Some cars are parked along the curb, and others are parked in spaces. People entering and exiting the cars are talking with one another, sometimes in raised voices as their paths toward their respective vehicles diverge. I hear one woman, who appears to be middle-aged, say to another woman in a loud voice, “I don’t know what I’m going to do for those two weeks.”... In the Center parking lots, a woman steps out of her vehicle. She is Black, she is wearing some dress pants and a nice red top. She sprays something on her child’s arms and legs.... A white woman steps out of a Toyota Corolla with a Black child. The child appears to be between 5 and 9 years old. The child takes the hand of the white woman. The white woman is wearing a sleeveless black tank top with black shorts....As we look around the lot, we see that all of the cars are fairly new and recent. The man with the BMW steps out with a child. The child is wearing khaki shorts and a dark blue tee-shirt. The man has money in his hand as well as a small lunch box with [a name] written across it. They both start walking towards the Center when the man turns around and waves at someone across the parking lot hiding behind the bus... A woman walks out of the Center having dropped off her children and shakes hands with a man and waves to another family. Out of the Buick walks a woman with money in her hand and she opens a door to a girl; the woman picks up a small baby. The baby is wrapped in a blanket... From the Ford a young woman, who might be a teenager, helps a boy out of her car, and they both walk towards the Center.

Inside the Center during morning drop-off, the research team observed:

It is neither noisy nor quiet; I can see children of various ages, from elementary school to older, perhaps middle school, playing and talking behind the glass doors and walls of a room to my right. Their demeanor is calm, and they are in small groups around different tables, some of which are game tables. The desk staff person, a young Black woman, greets me with a smile from behind the console. As I walk past the sign-in table, toward the workout area, another young Black woman appears from somewhere with a ring of keys and says, “it’s been busy this morning,” and unlocks the door for me.

Nearby the C. C. Woodson Center, our team also observed children and older youth interacting without any adults visible nearby: “I see five young black boys walking in the direction of the C.

C. Woodson area. The boys are young wearing basketball shorts and one boy has no shirt on.” And in a different outside area near the Center: “There are children playing with each other and no adult in sight .... The children wave with smiles on their faces.”

In our interviews, we often heard participants indicate that they or other adults maintain an awareness of interactions between parents or other caregivers and children in the neighborhood. Tucker, who works at the C. C. Woodson Center, said, “I think, for the most part I’ve seen with the parents and kids, it’s a good relationship, you know, the kid if they do something bad, they’re going to tell you to get it together, but for the most part what I’ve seen is good interaction with them.” Sarah, an early childhood professional, put more emphasis on the contrasts she sees:

I’ve seen some where there is good parenting and they make sure the kids get specific things and help them, and then some where, I just see, they let their kids do whatever and let them go about whatever they want to. And seeing their lifestyle, the child will model their lifestyle after those bad habits.

Sarah also talked about sleep and routine disruption at the program for young children with which she has worked in the past. She perceived this disruption being caused by parents and caregivers:

The children sometimes miss out because if they don’t arrive on time and get there at noon then they have already missed out on breakfast, lunch, and then we get to nap time and they don’t take a nap which becomes a conflict to deal with in our teaching.

Especially if the kid is just staying until 2:30pm then maybe [the parent] should have just kept the child at the house because when it is time for them to eat their snack it’s basically time for them to go.

Two community members specifically brought up their concerns with young mothers not being ready for their responsibilities and perhaps being overwhelmed. Lyla, an older community member who is a grandmother, said:

A few doors down from where I live, there is a young girl, she got four children and the oldest one is probably about six or seven. And she was screaming at him all day. But I think, one of them started school and the other is three years old, and I think he goes to the [Name] school. And she just had a baby.

Similarly, Caroline, a mother and young professional, commented on young mothers and how the difficulties they encounter may leave children vulnerable:

Raising children is hard. I’m not gonna lie, it’s hard even being a little bit older than [young mothers], it’s hard for me. Them still pretty much being a baby trying to raise a baby their problem is like, just get out of my house and don’t come back until dark. What is that gonna leave the child, “oh lemme just see what I can do, oh there go my friends we don’t have anything to do let’s walk around the streets and find something.” That’s when trouble finds them. Even if the moms they go out and they maybe have somewhere to go that might make a difference so they can look forward to doing something at the [C. C. Woodson] Center versus being out in the streets finding trouble.

Debra, who works in the summer camp at the C. C. Woodson Center, talks about the children she works with in a way that makes clear she connects their behavior and capabilities with their homelife:

[Working with five- and six-year-olds,] it's been interesting because we have some that only know themselves by their nickname and then we have others that can't read or spell their name. So you see a side of everything. We have some kids that are extremely smart and it all just depends on their home life... What is most obvious to us [about their homelife] is based on their behavior. There are some that cuss a lot and they think that it is normal and some of them will even say "because I do it at home" when we ask them why they did it and some that are really sweet and like being hugged. So really it depends.

Benjamin, who also works in the summer camp at the C. C. Woodson Center, worries that parents and caregivers who are more attentive may be turned off by the Center because of the adults in the neighborhood giving a less family-friendly impression. In response to the question, "What do you wish were different in the neighborhood?", Benjamin said:

Maybe just to get a little more diversity and bring a little more people in, because I know some people they bring their kids here and they will judge the area by what they see, like over there where people are just in their cars and stuff like that, they'll judge the area and not want to bring their kids [to the C. C. Woodson Center].

## **Interactions with decision-makers of policies & programs, systems, and built environments**

### What is working

Through our observations and interviews, it was clear what an important and positive role the C. C. Woodson Center plays in the lives of those in the Forest Park neighborhood. Benjamin has worked at the Center during summers for several years. For him, working at the Center is a chance to interact with the youth he cares about and also a chance for his own development.

When we asked him why he comes back each year, he told us:

Mainly the kids, because they wanted people, I was with the young teens and pre-teens last year and a lot of them wanted me to come back and then afterwards that's when [the managers at the Center] asked me to step up and be [in a supervisory position], so I definitely want to do that and try to help myself up.

Tucker, who also works at C. C. Woodson, talked about the activities at the Center and how they offer attention and positive opportunities for children who may not get the needed attention at home. In response to the question, "what types of things do they teach here at the Center?", Tucker responded:

Honey, everything. Really you can tell where some kids come from and their backgrounds and they are just trying to better themselves here. But they need attention, you can tell those attention seekers because they don't get it at home.

Gladys, who is a grandparent and a leader in the community, spoke about the variety of institutions and community members which play a role in children's lives and in keeping the community connected, including churches, grandparents, the C. C. Woodson Center, Spartanburg downtown, and the public library:

There are four big spiritual institutions that are located less than a couple of miles from each other. So within our neighborhood, those four major institutions are very active and that leads to us constantly having to [share information about] activities in the spiritual houses. So that's my core of my daily focus. As far as the kids are concerned, checking book bags is the first thing before heading out the door. We always make sure that they are engaged in some sort of literacy experience or other significant kind of numeration kinds of things and their homework. The extra things that the kids thoroughly enjoy are coming into CC to the waterplay that CC provides in the summer months and in downtown, the library, and the interactive-ness with that facility is phenomenal. We love to go there. They love to go to the splash pad out at the Airport Park. And that is a daily kind of focus.

Speaking more specifically about the public library, Gladys described why the design of the library and its summer programs are so well suited for adults to bring children:

There's an enclosed indoor playground and branched off from there and the books, there is an interactive area of activities and stations with a computer room that is geared for the young ones and there is also even a teen nook. It is very well stocked and cared for with activities for children of different age brackets. The ages go up to 12 and the teen from 13 to probably up to 17. The one thing that is featured in the library very well is having instructional settings for the various age groups during the summer. We don't get to attend as often as we'd like to but the thing that we enjoy is the book bingo where if you win you can come up and select your favorite book. [My grandchildren] are in the summer reading program where they get to benchmark to prizes where they get to read up to 50 books and we mandate that my grandchildren read 50 books. We don't stop after 20 or 25, we are going to do it all and they enjoy it, there is no resistance and that is because the prizes they receive make them feel like it's worth their time. So that's a plus. And the library staff makes it so celebratory and it works when they come in and it makes them feel so special.

Sarah, who lives in Forest Park and has worked in a pre-kindergarten program, explained to us her interactions with parents as part of her work, and how the teachers can work with the parents and caregivers to help the children:

We have meetings with the parents where we let them know what we have observed. We can recommend the parents to different programs that the child can benefit from so that when they enter school they can be ready. For example, we might have children that may need help with speech or something else and so they get flagged in the system. So we try to introduce and help them to programs. There was once a child that I thought was ignoring me after calling his name several times and never budging so we ended up having a conversation with his mom telling him that we thought he might have a hearing problem. Catching things like that helps because he was smart but was not talking clearly enough like the other kids.

## Gaps

A fairly high level of transience in the neighborhood, combined with institutions and policies not meeting the needs of the community members, leave gaps for the children and families in the Forest Park neighborhood. In reference to the Spartanburg Housing Authority dwellings, Sarah pointed out problems with who can and cannot live there, and the lack of care for the property:

Like the housing authority. I used to live in it as a teenager but chose not to live in it now because I already knew how it was going to be like. You had to have had children which was one of the stipulations which is already kind of discriminating because if you don't have kids, you can't stay there. Or if you have a roommate but no one wants to have a roommate or if you stayed with your parents and then you know that you can get help with rent. But yeah I chose not to live there because people who do live there are low income and I hate to say it they don't care about where they stay because it's not their house. And when you don't have to pay for it, you don't care for the place. They are changing that now. If you break something you have to pay for it to make people stop destroying them.

Several participants spoke of the need for more 3k and 4k programming. Sarah particularly worries about the gap for children who do not have any notable special needs and may therefore fall through the cracks:

I would like to see the Forest Park area grow more and with the kids, we get them ready for school but once they turn age three then it does not matter... there are only limited spots for 3k so it seems like some of the kids get lost and we try to help the parents and encourage them to get them signed up but there is not enough slots. I hate to say it, but if your child [has] special needs or doesn't seem like they're on track where they are supposed to be, then it seems like they will get the program a little faster. If your child seems smart then they probably won't get in. I believe it's because it's a government program, it seems like some kids don't have the opportunity to go to 3k and [they] get lost. There really is not a big selection for 4k.

Sarah went on to explain:

There used to be a 3k at Park Hill. But it seems like we need more programs for 3k and 4k so the smarter kids don't miss out on what the other kids are lacking in and should stay up to the same speed. You wouldn't want them to miss out. I'm not sure what happened to the funding for 3k but the 4k program is still there at Park Hill.

In addition to the need for more 3k and 4k programs, the neighborhood would benefit from more programs and spaces for older youth looking for things to do, especially during the summers. When we asked Benjamin about how the neighborhood and the C. C. Woodson Center are different in the summer when children are out of school, he explained:

A lot more of the kids, they like to be out all day during the summer because we don't allow kids in [the Center] past 6:00 for safety reasons. I feel like they try to be out more, and if they are not allowed here, they try to go out and do something else. But during the school year, you know, they have obligations and stuff like that.

For the programs that are available for children, the sponsors and teachers need to build trust with the parents, but that trust can be difficult to establish with young parents who are newcomers to the neighborhood or who are transient. Caroline, a young mother and professional, explained:

You know maybe just doing some outreach programs and building that trust with the parents, especially if they are teenagers and they haven't been exposed to stuff like that you gotta build that trust up... But then again, like I said, they are renters so they are in and out. So, if we can catch them when they first move in and already have something set in place then it would be a little easier.

Sonya, a grandmother in the neighborhood, expressed concern specifically about parents she perceives as transient and not members of the Forest Park community, and how the community can best help their children:

We need to find a way, and I have been praying about it and praying about it. There are Centers here, and there needs to be something that gets those kids over here and yet those children, they do what is taught and their parents don't know. What is it that we can do to get these children because what they have been brought up in and how the parents are teaching them and what they see, yeah, they are at risk.

Sonya went on to discuss the difficulty in getting transient or simply busy, distracted, or overworked parents involved in programs for children, especially when transportation might be required:

Because we had a meeting, Mrs. Gibbs was one of the ladies in there, and she mentioned that there was a lady that worked in the library or something and that they have these programs. Okay, good, they have these programs here, good. But what about those children that have those parents that go to work and the parents come home and they are tired and the children just out there running up and down the street playing in the neighborhood. What can we do to get that child from there and into the program? Because I asked Mrs. Gibbs, you got this program in the library but the library is up there at Church Street, we are down here and how do you get that child there, and she said all you gotta do is call, but call who? Give me details, who do I need to call? When I was raising children, you know I mean, I was blessed and had a car and such to do my chores. It is different now. How do we get these children that is in the neighborhood, running around and the parent hollering around, "shut up, be quiet. Don't bother me" and the parents be on their phone the whole time not paying attention. [How do we get those kids] from the neighborhood to the [library] program that is for them?... How can we get the parents on board so that we can get them from the neighborhood there? I know they have a bus to go around. So it needs to be better advertised or better brought to the neighborhood, you could all go knock on doors and say "look, we have this program, can we come and get your child?" And take them here and do this with them. It's got to be something there. I think that their only concern is working and feeding that child and keeping a roof over their head. And the rest of the time, I hear people saying that they should probably put their kids in school but what about a couple of months that they are not in school?

Rose, a longtime resident, also expressed concern about trying to help children in transient families: “You know as they say, nine times out of ten, those children out of Forest Park, they probably move all the time.” Similarly, Sonya told us, “I see [parents not paying attention to children] going on and what can we do? To help these young parents. But like I said, you might talk to them today and by next week, they might have moved. So it has been a concern.”

Even for those parents, grandparents, or other caregivers actively seeking ways to help their children’s development, the programs are not always reaching them. Gladys, a grandmother, told us:

You know what, sometimes it is not that the people don’t have the desire or want to, but they don’t know what to do. I am included because when they were talking about the literacy component with my children, I would tell my grands “no, you’re not getting scissors and making a mess” but if it was how they could have been taught about fine motor skills, but now you are hurting children in a major way when you are not actually allowing them to handle and experience things. Same thing with training because they don’t do what they don’t know.

As Gladys’s comment makes clear, grandparents are often involved in the care for children, so programs for children need to engage these older caregivers. Sonya, a grandmother, spoke with us about a variety of early intervention programs. “The thing about it, it’s good but there has to be a grandmother and a parent to get the child on board.” Harriet, also a grandmother, responded to Sonya’s comment and said, “Well that is what I was trying to do. I told my daughter that I was going to take the grands to the library and she said ‘you are going to do what?’ And I said ‘I am going to take them to the library.’ So I started taking them twice a week.”

With the children who have been successfully enrolled in intervention programs or 3k and 4k, there may be some concern about long-term progress for the mothers and their children. Sarah told us:

At my job [in an early childhood program] we talked about enabling the parents and seeing the parents come back and they get applauded, but to us, we think that you shouldn’t be staying in this program for so long, coming back having so many kids for ten years, you’re not growing. You would like to have new people but it seems like we got the same people that came back over and over again. They stay in the same spot. I’m sure they get opportunities to grow but I guess they don’t want to. It’s okay that people have children but after ten years with six children, you should be improving and not coming back. We have seen people that have grown, but still come back, because one can enter when starting at a low income but if it changes, once you’re in the program you always stay in it unless there is a gap; people know how to work the system.

Another concern with the children enrolled in programs is the difficulty of teachers and parents connecting with each other. In response to the question, “What do you wish were different in the neighborhood?”, Sarah replied:

Seeing the parent interaction is interesting because sometimes there will be parents that come in with their phone in their hand. We don’t really get to interact with them much but sometimes we are able to interact with them by greeting them. I am trying to think of

what the teacher-to-child interaction is like and well they are mostly too young to sometimes be able to express themselves but sometimes even a two-year-old will tell me that their stomach hurts. I wish there was a better relationship with the parents. Interacting with them and getting them on board with things can sometimes be an issue.

Similar to Sarah's mention of parents on their phones, Sonya also brought up her perception of how technological devices are changing adult-child interactions:

It is a sad situation because when I raised mine, we stayed in the library back in the day, we had a library card, the library on Pine Street. So it's just different because we have these tablets and things but we need to watch what they do with this stuff. And we don't communicate how we used to with our children and how it should be.

#### Differences of opinion: policing

Overall, our interviews and observations gave a positive impression of the relationship between Spartanburg City police officers and members of the Forest Park community. There were indications that the people in the neighborhood are prepared to reciprocate any interest shown in them by the police. At a Forest Park Neighborhood Association meeting, our team observed:

The police officers introduce themselves and then give a report of activity that has been reported in the Forest Park neighborhood. A mother punishing their child was called in. An AC unit being hit by bullets. A couple of assaults, one of them made by a young child towards his mother. One of the police officers is new to the meeting, explaining that his specialty is in education and working with kids. He shares about a couple of law enforcement clubs for teens that are being planned.

Gladys, an older adult and long-time resident in the community, spoke with us about encouraging people in the neighborhood to reach out to police and other agencies or offices as needed:

The things that we [leaders in the neighborhood] want to push and work hard towards is getting [community members] to be proactive and not maybe calling me at work and expecting me to direct their issue to the appropriate agency such as the police or the city or an individual representative or even church activities.

Gladys went on to explain:

We have inside a neighborhood officer and most of the time when we report, he asked that every time we report it if we observe something that doesn't look quite right. We report and they investigate. And we have numerous incidents where our volume of calls have caused these individuals to think we need to check up out of here and that's good for us.

Sonya, an older adult and longtime resident of Forest Park, expressed her concerns about people in the neighborhood who appear to be transient, and how they do not treat the neighborhood well. From her description, this seemed to be a situation she was able to successfully get the police involved in:

The lady across the street, they moved not too long ago, gets out of her car with a McDonald's cup in her hand... as I am out there cleaning my yard, she gets out and



walks right by the trash can and you would think that she would throw away her cup in the trash but she throws it right there and the wind blows it right across from my yard. “Hey, look, your cup there ma’am” I say and she said “oh it’s just a cup” and I said “well that cup is coming into my neighbor’s yard.” So I called the police and they came in ten minutes.

Gladys spoke about the history of connectedness with the police:

When we settled in and as the children got older, the ReGenesis project started, you probably heard of that if you are thinking of Forest Park. So we fully engaged in that. The city officer [Name] came by looking to start a neighborhood association. And I thought if a police officer has enough interest, then the least we could do is show... Back in the day 62 was the year of retirement, and if you are fully retired at 62, you still have a lot of vitality. The men actually would watch and walk the property. It’s like “You do the eight o’clock round, I’ll do the 12 o’clock round and somebody has to come back in and do the 6 o’clock round,” literally they would walk the neighborhood. If they saw anything that was out of the ordinary, they would make it a point to call it in and at that particular time, one of the particular activities that were implemented in the neighborhood was walkie talkies and the police staff was always greater in number and there was always someone nearby that could radio the police officer to come check.

Officer Taylor, who works in the neighborhood, spoke of this same history, how he has watched the community environment improve over the years, and the work he has seen community members and police do together to create that improvement:

Just how active they are. I am actually proud of them. From what it was back when I came here to how it is now, yeah, there has been a real impact. So the ideas that you have, they’ll tell you what they want, and you make it practical in what they can use and actually do.

When we asked Officer Taylor what reason he would give for the improvement he has observed in the neighborhood and in and around the new Center, he responded:

The community. It was 100 percent that, after Mr. Fisher came here we started a different policing practice called the COP philosophy when we get into the communities and not just drive through them. And it really worked.

In discussing the improvement brought about through this cooperation, Officer Taylor added that the improvement is already slipping due to there being fewer police officers available and the people who are cornerstones of the community aging:

Unfortunately we are short now and we don’t have the manpower like we used to. We used to have actual cops on bicycles and rode the neighborhoods so that you couldn’t just drive through. I have spent 5 years in what we call Project Team Cop unit and they would drop you off and you would walk for eight hours so you had to make friends. So it was eight hours of people either they were your enemies or your friends. To me the neighborhoods and the cohesiveness, it got real good for a while and now it is faltering because we are so short and the communities are becoming elderly and with the transition, young people bring young people in. They have neighborhood cleanups. You

see all the old people out there doing the work and then like I said it is not easy work so you have to get involved with your community. So that is one of the things that we need to work on getting more of the community involved. We have cut away from it but that is where we are hurting now because there is only one of me and there used to be a whole unit that did this job.

The only truly negative remarks we heard about police from people in the neighborhood seemed to involve police, including SWAT, who were not used to working with the neighborhood. When Martha, a neighborhood resident, mentioned drug dealers in the neighborhood, we asked her for more details. She explained how she and others had not felt safe because of the way officers handled the situation:

Oh my god. When the drug dealing started, me and my neighbors started noticing cars parked all along these two streets. At first, we thought it was a party. Then we noticed it was every weekend. Then it became most of the week. [People in the community] asked the police if they could make some sort of ordinance where you cannot park your car in the middle of the street and block the traffic. No one would answer the non-emergency phone number. So, we figured they wouldn't come to a Black neighborhood. So, then some of us went one morning and talked to someone, why are we paying taxes but no one is responding to our calls. One morning, a cop told us they were going to clean them up, they said that they have been a problem, [the police knew] which road they used to live in, and that they were going to do something about it. We were like "whoa, don't get us involved, we just want to get through our street without the bad traffic, it's not our business." Next thing we know, couple days later, we're going to the store, and we see SWAT cars. And then a police car come. Parks right in front on the lawn of the house of one of our neighbors [who was not involved in the drug dealing] instead of parking on the street. So, several of us who saw this go and try to ask for the officer's name, no response. We ask again louder, and the officer mumbles something. Those of us in that area were being threatened by the dealers. And we was just like, "We do not want to be involved in this, all of us who live here just want you to stop parking in our driveways for this kind of thing." We called to report what the cop did. The officer responds that he can park anywhere. But we're thinking, he could park a million other places but decided to do it in the yard of a house of a member of this community. The department ended up worrying more about [other things the officer had done] instead of how he had made the community feel not safe. So, I never call them.

## **Change**

### **Change identified as positive**

Residents and those who work in the community told us their perceptions that over the last 30-50 years, crime has decreased and inter-community networking has increased. When we asked, "What do you think has helped change the neighborhood?", Sarah said:

I'll be honest with you Mrs. Reeder and Mr. Richard was a big help by actually living in the community because most of the time people might want to help but they haven't lived in it. They don't help enough. They think they are changing the area but don't really get to see it because they are not there and they come by during the day time they see the good part of it and then they come during the night time and see the real part of it. You can drive through and see the change.

One older resident, Charlie, explained that new home constructions "are upping the value of the neighborhood, the lifestyle when you start building those types of homes you're going to have more diversity of people moving into those homes."

When we asked about the decrease in crime we were hearing about from residents, Officer Taylor said:

It has been a dramatic change. I left [other Southern city] to come here since there was more business down here [compared] to [other Southern city] back in the '80s. The Southside of town was considered one of the worst neighborhoods and it has changed dramatically and it is just like when you hear all the numbers [from the monthly report at the community meeting] for the whole month all they had was three domestic calls. Now some months are quieter than others but other than that though the southside has gone down from crime ridden to almost not. It is like any other community in the city pretty much.

Benjamin, who works at the C. C. Woodson Center, spoke of how the frequency of crimes and neighborhood disturbances has lessened over the years thanks both to police involvement and community action:

I know when we first moved over here it was a little rough at first, and down in my area it was like the people down there liked to throw parties a lot, they would have tons of people lined up across the street at night, but then as the years started going past they started to fix that, well I know they had police come down a couple times to try to fix the situations, but then I feel like the community meetings we have every now and again helps out to try to get people to cut down and that and get them to realize that, you know, the whole street is for everyone so you can't block people's parking spaces and stuff like that.

Officer Taylor spoke about the increase he has seen in community engagement and neighborhood interconnectedness:

When I first came [in the late 80s] here, the communities were not cohesive at all. Now they are joining. You have South Converse Street just up the road. You have Forest Park here and we are fixing to start [a neighborhood association] at the South Liberty end. The communities are more involved just like the light project, it does not seem like much but the city of Spartanburg got one million dollars to make some light displays. The communities fought over it so much and the communities were so involved that one project became seven and the two communities on the southside are the only ones that are keeping their stuff going. They have to keep it up once it was put in with repairs and

fixing and running whatever they have to do themselves. They got theirs and South Converse has theirs out there, South Converse got the smallest one but during the night time a dark, dark...the strobing lights go on all night long. So they light up the whole community. But the communities themselves are the ones doing it.

Benjamin spoke of the positive changes he has seen and attributed much of the community success to the C. C. Woodson Center's involvement with the community:

It's become more family friendly. Mainly with this community center how we offer more stuff for kids and they can come up here and stay out of the street or do random stuff.

They can come up here and at least be able to use the computers, play basketball, swim and play and stuff like that, because a lot more kids will learn how to swim now and that's great.

### **Change identified as negative**

The negative change spoken of by residents was primarily associated with properties being managed by property management companies and occupied by renters, which longer-time residents associated with transience. Residents also expressed concerns about the affordability of new constructions in the neighborhood.

Gladys told us:

Many of our properties are being managed by property management companies so that's the new issue that we have to deal with that I don't like. Being a homeowner brings a different nature of a person. When you have individuals who rent their property it's different, even their neighborhood interaction is different. Sometimes they bring on cultural habits that we prefer not to embrace in Forest Park.

Other longtime residents also made references to changing cultural habits, and less care for the neighborhood, which they perceived to be coming from renters and residents of government housing, and also from a change in the neighborhood from when, in the past the now-older adults did a lot of work to maintain the neighborhood, to now with younger people occupying homes as renters. Adella said:

When I first moved in, almost 50 years ago, my house was one of the first ones [in this part of the neighborhood], it was a nice neighborhood that kept updating their houses and their lawn and the children got along well. From then to now it was a big change because there is Section Eight. There are renters and there are buyers and people that don't care. [Researcher: In what ways do people not care in the neighborhood?] When they don't handle taking their trash cans out and bringing them back in would be good and if they kept their yard nice and having the grass cut. That would be a big help there. A lot of the seniors have left and the children come in and pick up but don't do the same as the parents. It's a big change.

Karla, an older resident, spoke of the changing culture in the parent-child interactions she observes:

[Back when I was raising my children in the neighborhood,] we more or less knew everyone who lived in the house and we kept up with our children. I don't know how

close of contact the parents are today and I am not trying to down the parents, I just note that yesterday we kept a closer tab on our children, at least that is how I feel.

Martha, an older adult homeowner, complained that the mixture of owned homes with rental properties hurts the value of her home:

I had my son here. I do not know why I expected it to be the same, but I came back anyways. I chose to purchase my home, I love my home itself, but I do not like how things are run here. Did I mention how mixed the renters and buyers are? I feel like I got a raw deal, because I bought my house for a good substantial amount of money and I call my insurance company and they can tell me what value the house is next to mine and down the street.

### **Change phrased neutrally**

From our interview participants, we heard several mentions of the changing racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood, which seemed to be seen as a neutral change. Tony, an older adult, observed, “I think Forest Park, out of Black neighborhoods, has the most diversity of white families that have actually moved in and so have Hispanic families.”

Charlie, also an older adult, observed diversity in a neutral sense and noted that the change in population of the neighborhood might mean fewer people know each other, but the sense of community is still going strong:

Day to day I would say Forest Park is one of the older Black neighborhoods in Spartanburg, a traditional family setting, a lot of seniors, a lot of seniors are transitioning in and you know showing diversity in the community, with the community center I think it's a very close-knit community that you know everyone. Well I'd say more than 60% of everyone knows everyone that's in the community. It's that kind of a close-knit-ness. It's some of the older established residents that have died off and you see that transitioning now as the reason that I'd say it's down to 60% because before, all families and everybody knew everyone. As I was saying, it's a very vibrant, vibrant community.

## **Social relationships and place: co-creation in the neighborhood context**

### **Physical environment**

The researchers' observations of the neighborhood noted significant variation in elevation, variation in shade coverage of walking areas, and variation in accessibility, safety, and appearance of the sidewalks. At a Forest Park Neighborhood Association meeting the researchers attended, community members shared information on neighborhood landscaping status and efforts, and shared litter reports.

### **The neighborhood in general**

Research observations near the neighborhood meeting indicated a mix of clutter and green space:

As we see people heading to the meeting, we notice clutter and abandoned cars that surround the homes in this area. It is sunny outside, but not too hot. There are many green trees and other forms of vegetation that produce a pleasant smell... I notice a mixture of houses with well-kept exterior appearances and manicured lawns intermingled with overgrown yards and aging exterior structures. Many houses are vibrant colors and have a variety of porch seating, including chairs, couches, sofas, and swings.

An interview participant commented on the mixture of new construction, which he saw as positive, with areas still needing attention:

I like how they built those new little houses on the shopping area, they are so cute. I think they bring more attention, but like where I stay, nearby they had just torn down a house that was like abandoned and so now it's like an open field but it's still trees and deer are over there all the time, but I know we can't do anything about that. It's nice though, and I feel like they should you know put a new little house or something up in there.

### At neighborhood edges

Observations indicated that at the neighborhood edges, the physical environment is less consistently well-kept and less likely to be pedestrian-friendly. Still, the amount of trees and other vegetation provides shade and green spaces.

Sidewalks and trees:

I turn from Duncan Park onto Caulder Avenue. The sidewalk on the left hand side of the road is covered partially in dried leaves and red clay and maybe small pebbles or clumps of hard clay. I notice that it is very shady on both sides of the road; there are large oak trees and a forested area on the right hand side of the road, and there are large trees among the houses on the other side of the road. The forest appears to be thick on the right, as it is very dark for midday.

Water management and litter, in contrast to other parts of the neighborhood:

I notice at the bottom of the hill on Collins/Bomar there must be water that passes under the road because on the right hand side of the road, under trees, there is some structure that appears to be temporary (it is made of woven black, plasticized fabric, stretched between poles or stakes to form channels) for water management, and there is also a guard rail on the side of the road. At the bottom of the hill and in fact, along the descent, there is some litter in the roadway, which is a difference from what I had seen before, further uphill where there were houses on both sides of the road.

Vegetation likely to deter pedestrians or outside play:

I see an area that is covered densely in vegetation. This densely vegetated area is directly opposite from Collins Park. The tall trees appear to be oaks, and at a lower level, I notice invasive species like mimosa trees, which are in bloom, their pink blossoms showing through in the areas with more sunlight. I notice Ilex, lots of ilex, and I imagine the long, sharp thorns that I know the ilex have. I see kudzu draped over numerous plants.

A lack of shade makes a bus stop less-than-pleasant:

When we sit under the covering at the bus stop [near Liberty Square and the C. C. Woodson Center] the heat is much more noticeable than when we were walking and standing out in the open.

At a time when one might expect to see people walking:

Just before 8:30 on a weekday, we drive down through Bomar Ave. and through Collins Ave., and we see no one on the sidewalks. We do see a lot of movement of cars up and down the street.

### In the heart of the neighborhood

In the heart of the neighborhood, observations indicated more consistent upkeep of yards and sidewalks and a more welcoming atmosphere for pedestrians or those wishing to spend time outside.

Tidy lawns, houses, and surroundings: “There are houses on both sides of Woodview, and the appearance is of tidiness; neatly trimmed lawns and plantings.” Also:

As I travel down the hill, on the left, I pass a stretch of houses that look newly built. They all have identical black mailboxes, and there are short saplings – I think they are ginkgo trees – planted between the sidewalk and the roadway. Ginkgo trees are slow growing, and I know it will be many years before this stretch of roadway is shaded. A couple of the houses, all of which are brown in color, have solar panels on the roof. There are no large trees near these houses, and the lawns are all closely clipped.

Clear and safe sidewalks:

There is a sidewalk on both sides of the road on this stretch of Collins, and it continues for some distance. Unlike the sidewalk on Caulder, this sidewalk is completely clear, except for the occasional car parked on it and blocking pedestrian passage.

A welcoming green space:

The houses on the slope, the newer constructions, have given way to a park-like area. The lawn is clipped and there are branches stacked artfully at the perimeter of a cluster of trees.

A central part of the neighborhood that appears less well maintained, but still very much part of the community:

As we come into a new [part of the] neighborhood, we notice that the parts of the neighborhood do not complement each other. This new part of the neighborhood that we come across does not keep its garden maintenance up as well as the other parts of the neighborhood. We begin to see signs about a Forest Park neighborhood meeting happening at 5:30pm.

## **Agency & social capital in the neighborhood**

Consistently, our observations and interviews indicated a neighborhood that has a strong sense of community identity, multiple generations working together to maintain and improve the neighborhood, and a deep and abiding care for the children in the neighborhood. Longtime residents and their children, now grown, have professional connections outside the neighborhood that they can use to inform and supplement neighborhood efforts.

The research team's observations of a neighborhood association meeting provided clear signs of an engaged and organized community. Attendance at the July 15, 2019, meeting consisted of twenty adults and three children. We observed:

The meeting is organized using Robert's Rules of Order, and I hear people seconding statements and moving in an ordered way from one topic to the next... A neighborhood association member talks to the members and mentions a grant... She suggests the celebration of African American History in February and a block party... A neighborhood association member leads the group in a discussion about organization signage and city permits... A neighborhood association member talks about new boundaries. The street that she talks about most is Bomar Avenue. The discussion is primarily whether to include or not include Bomar in the new boundaries of Forest Park. An older adult speaks up wanting to clarify what it means to be in Forest Park.

Observations of the meeting also showed signs of community members who care about and trust each other:

Condolences are given to the loved ones of community members who have passed. Donations are also requested for the members that have passed, and a neighborhood leader asks the members to agree on a donation amount... Two women get up and leave their belongings behind. The women walk back in three minutes later with a bag.

A longtime resident, Max, explained to us the importance of the neighborhood association and the sense of community he feels in today's Forest Park neighborhood: "If something is not up to the neighbor's standards, they're going to call the president of the association and report some things that they may see, but overall day to day it's a wonderful place to live and come home and relax and enjoy the family." Another long-time resident, Charlie, expressed similar sentiments: "It's hard to get groups of people to come together at times and discuss things like this and at times like this. But that's the improvement, when you've got people coming together, that's power."

This same theme of looking out for each other and making it a point to know each other was expressed by Nona, a longtime resident, who said:

It's a very quiet neighborhood. And the people around me, right now, you know, it's been very genuine and talking to each other and knowing each other is important to know your neighborhood, I mean to know your neighbors. Because especially if there is something that goes on or happens, then we need to know that. Because we are neighbors.

Gladys linked this care for community to a longer history: "[In the past, when raising our own children], we housed children from many of the poverty areas and there were seasons when we kept the children under our nook." And several of the older adults, in conversation with each



other, talked about how they see long-term investment in community paying off in their successful grown children. Florence said:

I have found living in this area has been very good and very good to my children. I have two that have grown up and now I have grandchildren that are in college and that are studying to be [professionals] and I think it all came from growing up in the neighborhood.

Adella responded, “Well, I will have to top that because we have lawyers, doctors, and teachers and a little bit of everything [in our family].”

This long-term investment also has produced educated, empowered, involved community members. Gladys proudly told us about the neighborhood power and opportunity for learning that come from having these community members:

We also have a young lady who teaches early childhood at the Roy C. Henderson building which is less than a mile from here not within the parameters of Forest Park but I think the same kinds of things that she experiences from children that she teaches would be relevant to those that are in Forest Park. We also have one who we call our high-end senior citizen who is very involved with the library and I get her insight and her reasoning for being part of the library board has a lot of things to do with what she has seen raising her children in Forest Park and beyond. She also teaches the six- through eight-year-olds at the church that is less than a mile away from Forest Park, so she interacts with children who are from the Forest Park Area.

In our observations and interviews, we consistently saw signs of a community wanting to take initiative in its own forward progress. Community leaders helped us set up interviews, and strangers who did not know us welcomed us into meetings and public spaces and were anxious to help us get a sense of the neighborhood. When we thanked Nona for the interview, she responded, “Well I am just glad to be of help to you [in your research] because we need this kind of thing all the time and it might be of help to us in the neighborhood, because we could always use help and do things differently.”

Despite the high level of engagement in the community, some agency and good will is perceived to hit a wall with parents newer to the neighborhood. Sonya, a grandmother in the neighborhood, told us:

You got to deal with the parents now. Days have changed. But bringing it up to today. In my neighborhood we used to put out flyers every time we had an association issue. My street was [Name] and I am the type of person to knock on each door. If no one came through the door, I would just leave the flyer. But if someone did come to the door, then I would talk to them. Older people, will say “Hey how are you doing?” but then [these days] you have some parents that have little children, and I try talking to them and they’ll say “I’m watching TV, put it on the floor” and they don’t have time to talk to you.

The visible and stalwart presence and engagement of older adults in the neighborhood is a readily apparent strength, even though it also puts the neighborhood at risk if it relies too heavily on these aging community members. Sonya told us:

In our neighborhood, the people that are working and doing things are the senior citizens but we are getting old and we can't get out all the time... That's what I see what is wrong with the neighborhood. The people that are concerned and doing stuff are the senior citizens. We are old and we are tired. And we done did that.

Speaking with the older adults, we consistently heard them express care for children in the neighborhood, including children they did not know. Karla said:

And that is the thing that I was talking to someone about is that I am a senior living in a senior area where we don't have any children, however, children from our neighborhood were tested [for school readiness]. Is there something given to us that show the score of, the possibility of us maybe being able to gather these children together to some type of activities to see what we could work with.

We witnessed a conversation between a group of older women brainstorming together about how to help the children who were transient or new to the neighborhood. Sonya said emphatically: "Yeah, I ain't going anywhere. I love my neighborhood but the thing about it is that, my heart burn for the younger... we talk about these children, the children that are at risk. That is what I am talking about. We done raised ours and I think we did a fine job. But how do we talk to the parents?" Pearl responded, "Well maybe we need to talk to them like we are all talking together here at this table discussing. You tell them there is a free meal, they come." Sonya replied, "So maybe if we serve them some food because we have to start small before we go big and we do something out in what I call old Forest Park, maybe if we have a cookout and get the young parents and the children and then we can talk to the parents one on one."

We heard the same kind of care and determination to help the next generation in a mother currently raising her own children in the neighborhood. Viola said:

I think that some of the responsibility has to come to the parents, to us. We are trying to share with somebody else what we as parents need to do. These days there are children having children but somewhere along the line we have to take responsibility for the children that are here... Parents are the first teachers. It should not be up to anybody but me to teach my children. So I think that somehow church or the community has to teach people responsibility and pride of the family. You talk about children going to school, but if I am the first teacher, instead of yelling and telling them and getting them out from under my feet, teach them while I got them there. And of course you don't have to have a lot of things to teach children. You use the ability you have that God gave you to do some things. And everything is provided for them. They should not have to wait to go to kindergarten to learn their colors. See I am the first teacher, so it should be my responsibility. You may not have a swing set, like mine did not, but who is to say that you can't pick up a rope and tie it up on the side of a tree.

And lastly the C. C. Woodson Center, and the young people getting involved through the Center, represent great promise and strength for the future of the neighborhood. Debra, a camp counselor

at the Center, said, “Working here, we make sure we help kids read and help them with getting ready to go back to school and making sure that the ones that can’t write well, we try to help them and make sure that they have a good time before they go home.” Benjamin, a young person who has worked multiple summers at the C. C. Woodson summer camp, said “I just like to help out with my community first because before I started off working here I did volunteer work because my dad is [active in the community and beyond] so I have to make sure to stay involved with the kids and help out wherever I can.”

### **Multigenerational dynamics: memory and community mapping onto place**

In many of our conversations with Forest Park residents, the sense of place and history-of-place came through strongly and clearly. People spoke to us about growing up with family, extended family, and friends in the neighborhood, and often these conversations included specific street names, specific areas of the neighborhood, or other details that seem to still have resonance for those who know (and love) the neighborhood.

Our interview participants frequently connected family with Forest Park, often back multiple generations, and often with specific places or properties mentioned. In response to the question, “What is your favorite thing about Forest Park?”, Debra said:

Being that most of my family has lived here in Forest Park and that I have made many good friends... My grandma also grew up in Forest Park her whole life and them having a lot of stake in the community a lot of people know their name and if I say that name and that I am related people always say ‘Oh I love the [Name] family, I remember when...’ It felt tight knit.

In response to the question, “have you lived here in Forest Park for most of your life?” Tucker responded:

Kind of, my grandma stayed over there and when she got sick, we moved in with her and then she passed away so we are still at that house, but we have another house. ... I really go to work, come home, do what I got to do, you know, and I am in college too, so I go back and forth from [elsewhere in South Carolina].

The history of the C. C. Woodson Center, including programs offered there long ago and fondly remembered, came up frequently in our interviews. For instance, Debra said, “Growing up there was an after school thing that they had here where we would do our homework and do activities and I don’t know if they still have that here or not. I remember a few years ago they did the 4H club here and that was pretty cool too.”

Our participants spoke of older and younger generations now in Forest Park as having separate geographical locations. Debra said:

Honestly, there seems to be a good community dynamic but I feel like it kind of depends on which part of the neighborhood you go into. Because I feel like in the areas where younger people live, there is more of a disconnect but whenever you are near the old people they ask if you need help, just let us know and they are really nice and generous.

Harriet, an older adult, speaks of the “old folks section” where she lives even though she has younger neighbors:

I think we are blessed where we live and we live in the old folks section. But those of us we are on [Name] street and the same families have been there. The [Name] house is there and a granddaughter lives there in the house, and we don't see..., we are next door neighbors, we don't see anyone down there but the son keeps the grass cut and the hedges trimmed so that helps the up-keep.

Perhaps most powerful in the stories and positivity we heard was the pride in the fact that young people who grow up in Forest Park choose to come back and build their own lives in the neighborhood. Gladys, a grandmother and longtime resident, told us:

The redevelopment, we are proud to find out the latest Way to Wellville report and the listening campaign that the things that Forest Park had were the things that caused people to come back. They lived in Forest Park and grew up in Forest Park, went off and could have chosen many other neighborhoods but chose to come back to build. So there are a lot of little private trophies that make us feel like we have done what God has ordained us to do for our Forest neighbors.

This pattern of growing up in Forest Park and returning even occurs in the older generation. Harriet said:

I grew up in one house [in Forest Park] and then married and I moved to [nearby neighborhood] for less than six years. The manager told me that we had to move and would put us out. That housing which is now [nearby neighborhood] is based on your salary and every year they went with your salary and then your rent would go up. So this is what he was saying, he says ‘You gotta go, it is time for you to get out and start looking for something.’ And the Lord was just good to us and we found those houses that were being built in Forest Park.

Similarly, Gladys has her own story of growing up spending time in Forest Park, then choosing as an adult to live and raise a family there:

The history that surrounds me with Forest Park is that as a child, I grew up in Duncan, well at that time we didn't know we were poor, but my parents owned a car and my father's closest relatives and my mother's all lived in this parameter, [in Forest Park]. Aunt Suze [lived here and] she was one of the renowned missionaries in her day. Her thing was that she did not have any children. She taught bible study. She was a teacher. So she had a collection of books and all kinds of things... I lived through the first part as a child desiring to do the kinds of things that I did not get a chance to experience in Duncan because Duncan was very rural, you know. We went to church and then to school and that is the beginning and the end. And I thought that it was so awesome to have been able to join my cousins in several cultural activities. They had the knack of expressing arts during those particular days with your tap dance, your piano, your voice, all those kinds of things. That's all part of when I grew up.

## **5. Preliminary Recommendations for SAM and SAM partners**

The long-time community residents with whom we spoke have labored together to create a Forest Park that is proud and strong, and the younger people with whom we spoke also indicated they valued and benefitted from resident-led community building. These perspectives suggest efforts, including those around early childhood, may fruitfully build on the sense of agency, initiative, and collaborative problem-solving in Forest Park. Informed by the data gathered, we make the following recommendations:

- Celebrate the agency, initiative, and collaborative problem-solving in Forest Park as a powerful community asset, and amplify ideas and initiatives generated in the community, such as the desire of long-time residents to connect to newer residents, including renters with young children, in neighborhood-based programming. Long-time residents are very aware of newcomers to the neighborhood and have a desire to see children and youth be connected to opportunity. Consider partnering with Neighborhood Association members and others on strategies to reach newcomers with information about existing programs, including Triple P, available 3K and 4K programs, and other initiatives.
- Where residents identify gaps that access to resources could help close (receiving training or information about Ages & Stages; Triple P marketed to grandparents), help connect them to resources.
- Memory, anchored in physical environment, gives long-time community members a sense of history that is a reserve of strength. Tell stories of attainment featuring those of different generations and especially of near-peer young people, and when possible, disseminate them at the neighborhood level, for example, in programming or visual displays at the C. C. Woodson Center, as well as countywide.
- If there are ways to facilitate more and deeper connections across generations, do so. Youth express appreciation for the care they see from elders, and elders express a desire to invest in youth.
- Though neighborhoods have fixed geographical boundaries, people move across them over the course of their lives and days. Their knowledge and understanding of dynamics of individuals' experiences over time and space is an asset. Utilize a systems approach, with participatory inclusion of residents (including renters and homeowners), to address challenges of children and families in neighborhoods of minoritized populations (such as Forest Park, Highland, and the Northside, all named explicitly by respondents in both Southside focus areas).
- Interviewee data from Forest Park and Highland suggests that some families with young children move across neighborhoods with frequency (i.e., are associated with transience) and have limited social connections with longer-term residents. Further study should be done to understand the lived realities of children and families in transient and/or precarious situations (such as situations of housing insecurity and/or eviction). One approach may be qualitative studies of households that have faced eviction; another approach would be to collect data around student mobility in particular schools within D7 or other districts in Spartanburg County to determine the extent to which student mobility exists. Conversations might be held with both local agencies and STRIVE network participants about interventions to mitigate any adverse effects of mobility on a child's early childhood development and/or educational attainment.