



## Lincoln

October 16, 2023

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### NE CARES COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSION

This report serves to document and summarize the main themes discussed at the NE CARES Community Listening Session, held on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2023 at Clinic with a Heart in Lincoln, NE.

Participants included representatives from the following organizations and agencies

- Lincoln Public Schools
- UNL's Children's Center
- Civic Nebraska
- Clinic with a Heart

### SUMMARY

Participants reported that Lincoln is a great place to live because it is family-focused with abundant resources, people coming together to solve problems, and access to state and local elected officials. Parks, libraries, and other "third spaces" were identified as places for people to gather together, however there remained a need for more. Participants also discussed the need for affordable housing, increased public transportation, and wages matching the cost of living.

Participants voiced ways UNL could partner with Lincoln by being willing to think outside the box and go beyond the confines of short-term grant cycles. Participants reported that they want UNL to be a reciprocal partner and be intentional in their relationships.

### THEME ONE: RESOURCES AND ACCESS

Participants reported many bright spots and resources in Lincoln, and many are working hard to ensure everyone can access them. These resources include collective work like Lincoln Littles, the Community Learning Center (CLC) advisory groups, and Center Pointe, as well as neighborhood centers like the Willard Campus and Belmont elementary, where resources are co-located to help increase access. Other resources include green spaces and the expansion of inclusive playground equipment. One participant commented, "not everyone has access to a therapist, but they do have access to a green spaces." Public libraries were also identified as important spaces for people to gather and a source of resources. While a few businesses were identified as "third spaces," such as Mana Games, there remained a need for more spaces, such as skate parks for youth.

Although participants reported the abundance of resources, they also were aware that not everyone had access to these resources and there were systematic ways that Lincoln could improve. One such avenue for improvement identified was an expansion of public transit services. Buses stop running at 7:00 p.m., and the routes are limited. Participants connected the lack of public transportation to the idea that neighborhoods feel siloed, and not connected to each other. The lack of transportation also exacerbates the food and health disparities in neighborhoods that lack grocery stores, pharmacies, and health care providers. However, participants were hopeful that the new downtown bus station would help alleviate some of these problems.

Lincoln serves as a refugee recollection city, which brings diverse people and diverse experiences. However, language barriers may limit refugees' access to available resources.

Participants reported that our unicameral is unique and our state and local elected officials are easily accessible and responsive. However, frustration remained at Lincoln's lack of affordable housing, including the development of luxury housing downtown and in the Telegraph district, rather than more affordable units in the city's core. Participants also noted that while housing costs may be lower than in other cities, wages remain low and utility costs are high. This makes it difficult for young people to stay because they cannot find housing they can afford and creates challenges for students who move from school to school as their families seek affordable, safe, housing.

Figure 1 Lincoln Listening Session



Participants reported that there are not enough resources for those who work with young families and parents, including early intervention services, afterschool care, and therapists in school buildings. One participant expressed their goal to provide high quality early childhood care for every child in Lincoln, that everyone will have access. Participants also noted the stress of both afterschool and childcare workers, noting that it is intensive but that the adults who work with children do not have access to the mental, emotional, financial, and health resources that they need. Participants reported that the job market has changed for those working with children, with more applicants who have no previous experience working with children. They also noted a high level of turnover and the length of training necessary making it challenging to get to high quality care.

Participants also reported a decrease of trust in institutions, including government and the university. They also noted a lack of collective power and that people, especially youth, do not understand how much change can happen when people grab hold of the power that they have. Youth have access to a wealth of information, and can be a powerful force when they come together. However, participants noted that many groups in Lincoln push aside youth voice and disregard their ideas for improving the community. They also expressed that high school students want to be heard and their ideas valued.

### THEME THREE: UNL AS A PARTNER

Participants described mostly frustration in working with UNL in the past. The major source of frustration usually stemmed from the lack of reciprocity and institutionalization after a project ends. One particular barrier noted was grant funding cycles that put an end to projects, even when community partners would like to continue the work. The limitations of the academic calendar were also noted, as well as not knowing who to contact at UNL. Participants noted that if they reached out to the wrong person, their requests did not often find their way to the right person.

Participants also mentioned that even though UNL is in the middle of the city, it doesn't feel accessible and there were not many low or no cost options for young people to be on campus. The sense that UNL is walled off add to the lack of confidence in higher education as an institution.

Participants elaborated on how some departments are better at engaging the community than others, but UNL is also very siloed, (e.g., city versus east campus, departments and units). One participant mentioned that they would love an all day training in how to access UNL's resources. Participants were disheartened that there were so many resources available from UNL, but very few opportunities to partner and collaborate in a way that was sustainable and reciprocal.

Participants mentioned how connecting the community to UNL or even inviting the community to experience campus would be great but also is a challenge because of potential financial needs/transportation to access UNL summer camps, time at the rec center for non-UNL students, etc. Even with current scholarship/sponsorships available to interested youth (Big Red Camps).

### NEXT STEPS

- Emily Trauernicht has volunteered to be part of the NE CARES Steering Committee.

- The NE CARES team and NE Extension will continue to act as connectors for ideas from the communities to UNL. Please reach out as you continue to have ideas!
- Hold an additional listening session to hear from more members of the Lincoln community.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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