

MINNESOTA Study Circles Evaluation Summary

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The Horizons program is designed to build community capacity to reduce poverty. The Horizons evaluations design is meant to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program and help sharpen future efforts on poverty reduction as an issue worthy of leadership attention.

Study Circles were developed by the National Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, CT. This Study Circles intervention to address poverty is intended to help communities "see" poverty and develop strategies for poverty reduction that can be undertaken in a community. The program format offers five, two hour conversations in small groups. A sixth meeting combines all small groups to conduct a large group community action forum.

The Study Circles program was implemented as one of the four components of the Horizons Program by University of Minnesota Extension in January, February, March, April and May, 2007. Pre and post surveys were used to gather information from community members (including youth, age 18 and younger) who participated in Study Circles as part of the Horizons program. These surveys are designed to determine whether the "intervention" of Study Circles contributes to the intended outcomes that community members:

- a) come to understand how they are connected to poverty;
- b) come to understand what poverty looks like in their community;
- c) begin to explore and understand why there is poverty in their community;
- d) begin to identify ways to reduce poverty, and
- e) begin to identify assets in their community.

Pre and post comparisons are made to assess the outcomes of this intervention.

Ten Horizons communities implemented Study Circles including: Chisholm, Elmore, Eveleth, Fertile, Floodwood, Hokah, Mountain Lake, New York Mills, St. James & Wabasha. These towns are 5,000 or below population and have at least a 10% poverty rate (range is 10% - 19.4%). The total population in the ten communities is 22,104 people. In these communities 2,861 individuals fall below the federal poverty guidelines.

STUDY CIRCLE SURVEYS-Minnesota Outcomes

A total of 578 study circle participants completed surveys; approximately 20% were youth.

	# Pre	# Post	# No Unduplicated	# Matched
Total Adult Respondents	473	341	548	341
Total Youth Respondents	105	74	119	60

ADULTS KNOWLEDGE OF POVERTY-Minnesota Outcomes

Prior to the program, adults knew the least about *policies to reduce poverty, community actions to reduce poverty, strategies to reduce poverty and individual actions to reduce poverty*. The greatest gains in knowledge occurred in these areas. The most knowledge after the program was about *kinds of poverty* and *possible causes of poverty*.

Participants were asked to respond before and after – How much do you know about....
On a 1-4 scale, with 1=almost nothing and 4=a great deal.

	Community actions to reduce poverty	Strategies to reduce poverty	Individual actions to reduce poverty	Policies to reduce poverty	How poverty affects community	Kinds of poverty	Possible causes of poverty	Reasons difficult to get out of poverty
Before	2.27	2.27	2.28	2.22	2.50	2.63	2.72	2.72
After	3.2	3.12	3.07	2.99	3.3	3.38	3.36	3.27
Change	+41	+37	+35	+35	+32	+29	+24	+20

YOUTH KNOWLEDGE OF POVERTY-Minnesota Outcomes

Prior to the program, youth knew the least about *individual actions to reduce poverty* and *policies to reduce poverty*. Significant gains were made in all six of the knowledge areas; with the least in *possible causes of poverty*.

Participants were asked to respond before and after – How much do you know about....
On a 1-4 scale, with 1=almost nothing and 4=a great deal.

	Community actions to reduce poverty	How poverty affects community	Strategies to reduce poverty	Individual actions to reduce poverty	Kinds of poverty	Policies to reduce poverty	Reasons difficult to get out of poverty	Possible causes of poverty
Before	2.07	2.08	2.05	1.88	2.15	1.96	2.38	2.52
After	3.21	3.19	3.12	2.86	3.24	2.93	3.25	3.39
Change	+55	+53	+52	+52	+51	+49	+44	+34

ADULTS KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION ON POVERTY-Minnesota Outcomes

After the program, the greatest number of people increased **their knowledge of poverty**. A significant number has already ***taken action to reduce poverty*** and more than half were very likely to ***take community action to reduce poverty*** and ***support policies to reduce poverty***.

	% Increased knowledge of poverty	Feel we can make a positive difference		Feel we can work to reduce poverty in our community		% <i>already</i> taken action to reduce poverty
		Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	
Total	86.1%	45.8%	45.8%	40.5%	49.7%	68.9%

Future –Take individual action to reduce poverty	Future - Take community action to reduce poverty	Future - Support policies to reduce poverty
Very Likely	Very likely	Very likely
46.9%	60.8%	59.4%

YOUTH KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION ON POVERTY-Minnesota Outcomes

After the program, nine out of ten young people had ***increased their knowledge of poverty***. Almost half had already ***taken action to reduce poverty***. Future actions were much less likely for youth than for adults.

	% Increased knowledge of poverty	Feel we can make a positive difference		Feel we can work to reduce poverty in our community		% <i>already</i> taken action to reduce poverty
		Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	
Total	91.0%	38.0%	46.5%	31.9%	46.4%	45.9%

Future –Take individual action to reduce poverty	Future - Take community action to reduce poverty	Future - Support policies to reduce poverty
Very Likely	Very likely	Very likely
26.1%	37.7%	28.2%

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Comments from participants reinforced these themes:

- Study circles can involve people not previously involved in the community.
- Poverty can be studied and better understood.
- The training model of study circles is solid.

People want to get involved. "They said that they wanted to learn more about the community...and that they want to get involved. Some have been here 5, 10, 15 years and never gotten involved. They want to get involved with the program." (from a Spanish translation)

This is the first time I ever get involved. "I liked the way...when we had the first meeting in the VFW, Legion. I like the way...it interested me the program for [our] community. I have been here 22 years and I never get involved in the community programs." (from a Spanish translation)

Let's do something. "It wasn't established leaders who came up to us and said "why aren't we doing some of these things"? It was more the people who haven't really ever been involved and who are ready to keep being involved. That came up to us and said "let's do something." And it was them that kind of pushed for the community cleanup just so that we could show some evidence that we're moving forward with what we talked about."

Various forms of poverty. "We did talk about the various forms of poverty. I don't know if that's the correct term but the fact that poverty isn't just the government guidelines for income. And that came out a lot ... They became very engaged too. We had people who were looking things up on the Internet. Looking at our unemployment rate. We had people reading books on poverty. People were constantly talking about it and keeping their eyes open for finding articles here and there."

Training model is very good. "I think it's been excellent. The trainings and everything ... they have been really good. Some of the best trainings I have ever had. And I've had a lot of trainings. They tell you about stuff and then you do like an activity and they kind of keep everything moving and the time goes past really fast. And that's really cool because most trainings it's just like a college class or something ... lecturing at you or talking to you. And these kind of get you involved. And just the activities that get you up and moving around ... they actually have a purpose. I think that's really cool. Because usually in a training that gets you up and moving they might get you up and moving and but [it has] little to do with what the training is. It's just to get you up and moving."

Study Circles are the wave of the future. "The Study Circle that's a stellar concept. And I think when we sold it we sold it from the aspect that "hey, this is the upcoming ... this is the way problems are going to be solved in the future."