



All Scholars, One Community

BY CAITLIN GIPSON

What causes change in a community? How can a city reverse systemic problems like violence or poverty?

According to Judy Hutchinson, Ph.D., APU's executive director of the Center for Service-Learning and Research, community-wide change requires connectivity. "Many city entities work to combat problems, including the police, churches, universities, and nonprofit organizations," Hutchinson explained. "But in order for their efforts to gain momentum, these groups need to partner together." To this end, Hutchinson recently spearheaded the Azusa Community Scholars program, a groundbreaking model for community development that established a city-wide vision for the future and provides practical steps to address Azusa's most challenging problems.

The program affirms that scholarship can reside outside a university setting. "Community development recognizes everyone is a scholar in his or her own area," she said. This program brought together experts from eight institutions representing different aspects of community health: Azusa Police Department (civic health), Our Neighborhood Homework House (nonprofit health), Azusa City Library (technological health), St. Frances of Rome Church (spiritual health), Neighborhood Wellness Center (physical health), Azusa Chamber of Commerce (economic

health), Azusa Unified School District (K-12 educational health), and Azusa Pacific University (higher educational health). Each group also worked with a part-time Azusa Pacific University student—a community partner intern—paid by federal work-study funds to provide research support and practical assistance.

To meet the program's first goal of identifying a common vision for the city, the community scholars polled their constituencies to identify the most pressing problems in Azusa, and then narrowed them down to the top three

concerns. The group identified violence, poverty, and quality of schools as the most critical problems, brainstormed what it would look like to succeed in each of these areas, and recast the problems into positive statements called "grand successes." For example, the problem of violence changed to the goal of "helping, understanding, peaceful, safe commUNITY." Hutchinson asserts that the change process requires this redefinition. "You can't build community on problems; you have to build it on vision," she explained. "We need something to work toward. So if there is a problem, it's very important to recast it in a positive light." With these definitions in hand, the community scholars identified initiatives to facilitate these grand successes and developed ways they could support each other's programs.

Meeting regularly throughout the spring 2011 semester, community scholars left each meeting with "homework" for their organization, which they accomplished alongside their APU community partner intern. "This program has taught me about Azusa's strengths, the connections different organizations have with each other, and the ways they network," stated Emilee Cook '12, the Chamber of Commerce community partner intern. "The additional support from other organizations has been vital to our projects and our work with our agencies. My involvement helped me develop skills in community organizing, which is what I'd like to do as a macro social worker."

That inclusive, collaborative approach also inspired community scholar Vincent Jantz, director of secondary education for the AUSD. "Through this process, we engaged with community members who work with the same people we assist, but from very different perspectives," he said. "Before, I thought everything radiated from the school district. Now, I more fully understand that we are one of many organizations working on behalf of Azusa."

That collaborative spirit transforms individual initiatives into integrated community efforts. For example, when Xavier Torres, patrol sergeant, presented the APD's Zero Tolerance Domestic

Community Scholars and Partners

AZUSA CITY LIBRARY	Community Scholar: James Peek Community Partner Intern: Evie Gustafson, '13
AZUSA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	Community Scholar: Vince Jantz Community Partner Intern: Rachel Hostetler '11
AZUSA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	Community Scholar: Steve Castro Community Partner Intern: Emilee Cook, '12
AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY	Community Scholar: Robert Duke, Ph.D. Community Partner Intern: Kate Finn '11
NEIGHBORHOOD WELLNESS CENTER	Community Scholar: Julie Pusztai, MSN, RN Community Partner Intern: Kyle Morrison '13
OUR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE	Community Scholar: Crystal Marquez Community Partner Intern: Hannah Morrison '11
ST. FRANCES OF ROME CATHOLIC CHURCH	Father Aloysius Ezeonyeka Community Partner Intern: Chad Seiler '13
AZUSA POLICE DEPARTMENT	Community Scholar: Sgt. Xavier Torres Community Partner Intern: Austin Thomas '12*

Violence Enforcement initiative, each group member offered ways to support the effort: APU's Ministry and Service students could work with victims; Azusa Unified School District could host workshops; the Chamber of Commerce could promote and participate in upcoming programs; St. Frances of Rome and Our Neighborhood Homework House could sponsor domestic violence seminars; the Neighborhood Wellness Center could provide an avenue for the police department to connect with domestic violence victims; and the Azusa Library could stock information on shelters and domestic-violence-related self-help books. "The Community Scholars program brought strangers together who became friends now working together to identify ways that we can use each other's resources to assist the community," said Torres.

The community scholars went through this same process for initiatives sponsored by all eight participants and addressing all three grand successes, resulting in commitments and ideas for an impressive 192 interconnected programs, events, or collaborations. "We need to continue to meet to provide accountability and assess progress, asking, "What difference is it making? Are we on track?" said Hutchinson, who stresses that follow-up meetings will be hosted by the different partners at their own locations. "This is a community endeavor, not one sponsored by APU or any single group. That's how you create sustainability and drive real change. We are all on an even footing, because we are all scholars. The people in each of these organizations bring unique talents and experiences to the Azusa community and this process." Hutchinson also plans to publish the results of the Community Scholars program for other universities and U.S. cities to duplicate. If this program continues on its current trajectory, Azusa may become the model for connectivity and city-wide change.



Caitlin Gipson '01 is a freelance writer, marketing consultant, and search engine optimization specialist in Reedley, California. caitlinsplace@hotmail.com