



Phoenix, AZ

▲ Community Example from Chapter 3 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Community Engagement for Equity

Community Background

Phoenix has brought patience and persistence to its health equity efforts in Maryvale, a low-income population of more than 200,000. The community is 76 percent Latino with a correspondingly high percentage of Spanish-speaking immigrants. Since Phoenix is a very difficult political environment for immigrants, shifting power arrangements to achieve equity could not succeed without sustained effort. Led by St. Luke’s Health Initiatives, the Maryvale on the Move (MTM) initiative sought “change that is rooted in and led by the community” and “change that supports fairness, justice, and equal access to the resources essential for good health.”

Community Action

MTM engaged three well-established, community-based partner organizations and other equity-focused partners to support more equitable access to healthy foods, safe and activity-friendly streets and quality parks. Most important, partners and staff worked energetically to prepare and involve residents in each of the changes. They developed bilingual, bicultural residents’ leadership capacity by engaging them in their native language to conduct environmental audits, charrettes and surveys. MTM facilitated access to “Creating Power, Connecting to Power” training and credentials through Colectivo Flatlander. They provided education about the influence of policy and the community environment on health. MTM informed residents about relevant planning and decision-making bodies and alerted them about upcoming public processes and decisions. Finally, it supported residents through real-time opportunities to collaborate with professionals and advocate for policy change.

Equitable change took various forms. In one case, staff supported Vecinos Unidos Siempre (Neighbors United Forever) through its assessment, advocacy and fundraising for safety, maintenance and amenity improvements to El Cielito Park during the park’s master planning and renovation process. Neighborhood stakeholders packed the planning committee, raised money, installed a mural and secured the inclusion of other important improvements in the plan, including a trail, lighting, school access and a recreation center. The plan was approved in October 2012.

After residents in another neighborhood received no notice of the sale of more than two acres in Little Canyon Park, MTM staff supported the efforts of their Save Our Parks committee to challenge the sale and draft a new policy. The citywide policy precluded municipal parkland from being disposed of without extensive public participation in the decision-making process. It was adopted in April 2013.

Whether the project involved pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, the Maryvale Core Plan, or citywide policy guidelines for community gardens or farmers’ markets, the MTM partnership persistently focused attention on removing barriers to participation and lifting community voices to negotiate the change process on the community’s terms. This included providing translation and interpretation at meetings and building mutually supportive collaboration between residents and agency professionals. This work has increased the Maryvale community’s capacity to advocate in its own interest and focused more attention on local policy change within St. Luke’s Health Initiatives. It has also created more openness to community collaboration within some public agencies, and helped establish an important equity focus to the broader, healthy community change that has begun to take hold in Phoenix.