

Sharing Visions: Intergenerational Work in Appalachian Ohio

Final Report

TEAM LEADS

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PROJECT PARTNERS

14th Street Community Center, Portsmouth, Ohio
Sunday Creek Associates (Shawnee, Ohio)
Dr. Rachel Terman, Ohio University (Athens, Ohio)
Friends of Shawnee State Park (Scioto County, Ohio)
Rendville Historic Preservation Society (Rendville, Ohio)
Buckeye Trail Association (Shawnee, Ohio)
Portsmouth Welcoming Community (Portsmouth, Ohio)
Watch Me Grow Ohio (Portsmouth, Ohio)
Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council (Shawnee, Ohio)
Destination Shawnee (Shawnee, Ohio)
Rural Action Inc. (The Plains, Ohio)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis that affected the structure and implementation of this program, the Sharing Visions met its goals of initiating cross-county conversations and collaborations between grassroots community organizations in Appalachian Ohio, particularly towards goals of fostering intergenerational collaborations. Travel restrictions and community organizations' need to pivot to meet basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic formed significant hurdles, yet the Sharing Visions team successfully implemented digitization and archival work as well as two "summits" bringing together community organizations in Perry County and Scioto County. The summits took place in November 2020 and July 2021, identifying issues facing community organizations, offering solutions in practice, and built relationships setting the ground for actionable collaborations now beginning to emerge. The program has also resulted in archival accessions to the Ohio State University Center for Folklore Studies Archives and local archives in Perry County, a publication in *The Journal of Appalachian Studies*, conference presentations, and several publications in progress. Sharing Visions efforts have connected 65 individuals representing 29 community organizations across

Appalachian Ohio and trained 19 students from The Ohio State University and Ohio University in archival and community-engaged ethnographic practices. Sharing Visions work will continue through evaluation and assessment of the Ohio Field School program, and through efforts to connect partnering organizations to others in the larger regional and global context with themes of generational succession in mind.

Results/Outcomes:

The overarching goal of this project has been to reinforce existing relationships and create new connections and structures to sustain small community organizations in Appalachian Ohio. This has been achieved through three principal efforts: generalizable information generated by generational and inter-generational focus groups led by Dr. Rachel Terman (Sociology and Anthropology, Ohio University); application of the Ohio Field School Service Learning Course (COMP STD 5189-S) toward the themes of intergenerational succession and collaboration in Appalachian Ohio; and implementing a series of online “summits” that gathered together local organizers and community organizations to share experiences and resources.

In summer 2019, Dr. Rachel Terman (Sociology and Anthropology, Ohio University) and her students conducted three focus groups aimed at understanding and documenting visions and practices of generational leaders (aged 18-35 or 35+) in Appalachian Ohio. These focus groups facilitated opportunities for intergenerational brainstorming of policies/practices around succession planning in community organizations as well as encouraged young people to speak to the future of their communities and organizations. Focus groups revealed that pride in community assets branched across generations, while an emphasis on “polite” vs. “impolite” issues could create divisions in where to place efforts. “Putting out fires while still building houses” was a major theme that emerged in the focus groups, as both generational cohorts pointed toward the more immediate needs to be addressed before amplifying community assets. Disagreements on how this balance should be maintained and approached were sources of difference between the cohorts. In generating solutions, the focus groups named “inviting people to the table” and “connecting opportunities for youth involvement” as crucial to bridging difference and fostering succession. We brought these themes into the next phases of the project in designing and carrying out our “summits” with community partners.

Sharing Visions project themes were also incorporated into the 2020 and 2021 Ohio Field Schools grad/undergrad course at Ohio State when creating student service-learning projects in Scioto and Perry Counties. Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth and Dr. Borland led sixteen students in participating in and documenting the efforts of seven community organizations in Perry County and Athens County. Through semester-long, collaborative partnerships with the community organizations, students digitized organizational records for future reference, interviewed community organizers from various generational positionalities, and documented the changing ways that local assets are built upon in Appalachian Ohio. While community partners emphasized that they frequently do not have the time or resources to look back and reflect on past successes and failures, OFS students were able to generate knowledge and tellable stories through oral histories and digital galleries generated from archival and ethnographic research. They can be accessed at (go.osu.edu/ofs). Dr. Patterson assisted in coordinating archival accessioning and ensuring community access to collected materials through locally-accessible

hard drives deposited with partners. Through the Ohio Field School, students, instructors, and partners have provided increased knowledge of organizational histories across generations and opportunities to share such histories in meaningful ways.

With guidance from the focus groups and partnership and trust-building from the Ohio Field School collaborations, the Sharing Visions team shifted toward planning a series of summits that would bring together established and emerging local organizers in Perry and Scioto County. While these were initially planned as site-specific events that registrants would travel to, the COVID-19 pandemic required that these be executed through digital means. In November 2020, we held eight Sharing Visions “Digital Summits” and in July 2021 we held four Sharing Visions “Action Summits,” all hosted by community partners via the Zoom platform.

Themes of the 2020 Digital Summits were generated by community partners, and were aimed at improving access to organizational resources, facilitating opportunities sharing common problems and unique solutions, networking between local experts and emerging professionals, and addressing succession planning in community organizations. Community partners facilitated eight discussions: “Volunteer Management,” “Collaborations with Higher Ed,” “Destinations and Tourism,” “Environmental Issues,” “Intergenerational Succession,” “Cultural Diversity in Rural Areas,” “Social Media Presence,” “Diversifying Organizational Leadership,” and “Collaborating with K-12 Educators.” These sessions introduced community organizers to similar organizations and similar issues in other places in Appalachian Ohio and promoted awareness about local, regional, state, and national resources to mitigate organizational issues and promote their longevity. As community partners had explicitly not asked for workshops, presentations, or training sessions, these discussions provided opportunities for networking while facilitators were affirmed as experts in navigating challenges and opportunities.

In spring 2021, it became clear that brainstorming, skill and resource sharing, and networking had planted seeds of collaboration had began to sprout, so we launched a series of “Action Summits” designed to provide spaces for planning and executing actionable collaborations between community organizations across Appalachian Ohio. These discussions were once again led by community partners and have resulted in collaborations that are beginning to have material impacts on Appalachian communities. The Sharing Visions Action Summits consisted of four sessions, “Building Youth Skills Through Intergenerational Skills,” “Reunion Events and Intergenerational Succession,” “Fostering Inclusion in Natural Spaces,” “Organizational Transition in the Shawnee Trail Town.” These Summits are promoting outcomes further discussed in the Impacts subsection. Overall, the Sharing Visions summits involved sixty-five individuals representing twenty-nine community organizations and educational institutions across Appalachian Ohio.

These three efforts have built toward our long-term desired outcome of contributing to the longevity and flexible continuity for small community organizations in Appalachian Ohio. We have had very positive feedback in from a summer 2021 assessment event organized by Dr. Borland involving Sharing Visions and Ohio Field School community partners. Future assessment activities are planned to assess impacts and structures of the Ohio Field School and the Sharing Visions program.

COLLABORATIONS:

Collaborations have taken many forms throughout this project, as we have worked to bring collaborative models developed in the Ohio Field School program in Scioto County to the Field School Program in Perry County and to Sharing Visions initiatives.

During the 2020 and the 2021 Ohio Field Schools, eight student teams partnered with seven grassroots community organizations in Perry County and Athens County (Destination Shawnee, The Buckeye Trail Association, Monday Creek Watershed Restoration Project, Sunday Creek Associates, Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council, Women Owning Woodlands SE Ohio, and the Rendville Historic Preservation Society) to digitize records and conduct interviews documenting organizational history and inter-generational succession with community-identified topics and publications. Collaboration through the Ohio Field School was instrumental in building trust to bring community organizations to the table for the Sharing Visions program. Community partners appreciated delivery on small, discrete projects directed toward community-identified needs before collaborating on the Sharing Visions summits. These student collaborations evolved into further research and public projects, with several students publishing or bringing forward work deriving from their community partner collaboration.

Community Partner Advisory Committees established in Scioto County and Perry County have been instrumental in fitting the focus of Sharing Visions to emerging themes and responding to local crises, especially in the wake of COVID-19. Partners from the CPACs advised the themes of the Sharing Visions Summits to best fit the local, place-based needs of partnering organizations, and formed the backbone of summits, often recruiting others to participate in the absence of sustained fieldwork from our team as a result of COVID-19. Community partners also facilitated almost all of the individual sessions, while Sharing Visions team members provided technical support and served as sounding boards for ideas. This reflected our central framework of collaboration that stresses leveraging university resources and skills to amplify community voices.

Collaborations with other Ohio universities have also been critical. Dr. Rachel Terman of Ohio University and her students led two focus groups aimed at documenting visions of the future of the region and intergenerational collaboration. Outcomes of these focus groups have informed the overall project by giving the leads information about the state of inter-generational collaboration in Appalachian Ohio and themes for this project's summits. She also served as a critical member of the summit-planning team. Dr. Andrew Feight of Shawnee State University also advised on the topics of the Sharing Visions Digital Summits and facilitated the "Destinations and Tourism" discussion.

Collaboration with OSU extension was also essential as OSU extension officers Treva Williams, Theodore Wiseman, and Grace Peach-Storey connected the Sharing Visions team with ongoing research collaborators and provided invaluable advice on creating and maintaining programs in local contexts.

SCHOLARSHIP:

Dr. Terman and two students Joy Kostansek and Franchesca Rife published a research note, “Intergenerational Community Visions in Appalachian Ohio,” summarizing their findings from the focus groups in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. (Terman, Rachel, Joy Kostansek, and Franchesca Rife. 2021. “Intergenerational Community Visions in Appalachian Ohio.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 27(2)).

Community partners Andrew Carter (14th St. Community Center) and Barb Bradbury (Hurricane Run Farm), both of Scioto County, collaborated with Dr. Patterson and Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth to organize a panel for the 2020 American Folklore Society meetings, which was well-attended and sparked interest in a follow-up panel for the 2021 meetings. Dr. Patterson and Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth are now finalizing a panel with Mr. Carter and John Winnenberg (Sunday Creek Associates) on university/community organization collaborations.

Student researchers in the Ohio Field School published a series of digital gallery exhibits based on their work with community partners (go.osu.edu/ofs). OFS 2020 student, Evan DeCarlo published a public-facing article, “Placemaking and Blue Blazes: The Ohio Field School Comes to the BTA,” in the Buckeye Trail Association magazine *Trailblazer*. The article summarized the history of intergenerational collaboration in the Buckeye Trail Association and the work of public folklore studies with scholarly rigor for a public audience. OFS 2020 student and OSU English PhD student, Jordan Woodward had continued research with Sharing Visions partners as her dissertation project, investigating ways in which community organizations collaborate and the language they use to describe their efforts. OFS 2020 students, Lydia Smith and Jacob Kopcienski continued their partnership with the Rendville Historical Preservation Society, winning a competitive grant to continue their research and outreach.

Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth is preparing a manuscript for the journal *Practicing Anthropology* to share the methods and outcomes of this project in a more detailed format.

Dr. Patterson and Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth are finalizing a publication, *The Ohio Field School: Place- Making, Service Learning, and Collaborative Ethnography*, a multimodal edited collection that explores the ways in which the Ohio Field School has impacted communities and student learning, which will include information about the methods, practices, and outcomes of Sharing Visions. The editors have had a preliminary prospectus accepted by the University Press of Kentucky and are readying a complete submission for review by October 2021.

IMPACT:

Sharing Visions, and work associated with it, has had demonstrable impacts on the communities and partnering organizations associated with the project. OFS students generated 544 digitized archival records for grassroots organizations, 26 ethnographic interviews, and 1,155 photographs and collected ephemera that will be directly pertinent to community organizations as they address intergenerational succession and the place-based. These collected materials have been returned to community partners for the reference of the organization and the broader community.

Furthermore, the Sharing Visions team has provided training and materials to rehouse delicate collections for community partners at the Monday Creek Restoration Project, the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council, the 14th Street Community Center and Rendville Historic Preservation Society.

OFS work and continued preparation for the Sharing Visions summits has partners thinking about inter-generational knowledge transmission and encouraging leadership opportunities for young people within organizations. At Community Partner Advisory Board meetings and the summer 2021 assessment, we heard from several partners that our work had given them an opportunity to reflect on their organizational histories and intergenerational efforts in new light. These changes have been reflected in a growing presence of young people participating in Sharing Visions events, and carrying forward the work of partnering community organizations.

Fostering collaboration between organizations has also had demonstrable impacts. During the COVID-19 economic crisis, project partners John Winnenberg (Sunday Creek Associates) and Andrew Carter (14th St. Community Center) exchanged ideas and advised each other on mutual aid responses and resources related to the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. After networking during the Digital Summits and planning during the Action Summits, Rural Action is now establishing new structures for internship opportunities in Scioto County with Sharing Visions community partners, Watch Me Grow Ohio and Friends of the Shawnee State Park. The Buckeye Trail Association has partnered with the Friends of the Shawnee State Park and the Portsmouth Welcoming Community to create women-led and LGBTQ+ trail adoption crews on the Buckeye Trail. Lessons learned from a unique community-network structure in Shawnee, OH are also generating new possibilities for revitalization efforts in Scioto County.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant hurdle to our proposed program, as our collaborations are usually couched in significant face-to-face field research. Redefining the central tasks of the program, which at their core involved travel and considerable face-to-face contact, was overcome by close contact with community partners and collaborators, yet digital programming brought up issues of its own. Digital programming required much more recruitment than anticipated, particularly as people began to feel the impacts of over exposure to digital programs. Our efforts at advertising online through facebook and email bore some fruit; yet need to be evaluated for their efficacy. The material realities of the COVID-19 crisis for community organizations meant many of our partners were scrambling to pay rents and meet other basic needs, or as one partner put it, “we are the first to suffer and the last to heal.” Recalling the themes of the focus group in attempting “to build a house that is on fire,” we had to transition to provide more support than anticipated to community partners. Through providing this support, we learned that the success of community-based projects is often based on responding to emergent community needs, a process that builds trust toward future collaborations.

FUTURE PLANS:

In consultation with the Office of Service-Learning, we have received an extension for the assessment of the Ohio Field School to be carried out in academic year 2021-22. Thus, the

Service- Learning Grant funds will be put towards evaluation by community partners and contracted professionals in Folklore Studies. Dr. Borland will be spearheading this initiative, as Dr. Patterson is leaving OSU effective August 31, 2021, and Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth is moving positions in the University. Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth is currently drafting a white paper with conclusions drawn from the Sharing Visions program to be shared and workshopped with community partners. Dr. Waugh-Quasebarth is also working to connect the project to national and international groups dealing with similar questions of succession in his other areas of research in Appalachian Kentucky and West Virginia and the Carpathian region of Romania. In academic year 2021-2022, he will be working to take Sharing Visions goals and methods and apply them to the larger regional and global context.