THE COMMUNITY INVESTIGATORS PROJECT

Welcome Investigators!

RUTGERS
Institute for Women's Leadership

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.

Mission Statement:

The Community Investigators Project is an urban research program committed to **integrating urban working-class voices** into the foundational functions of social, economic, and political spheres and **providing coalition-building spaces.**

We achieve this goal by **making research and knowledge-production easily accessible for youth** in working class communities to **redefine** 'viable' **information in our socio political dialogue.**

The Frightening Rise In Low-Quality, Low-Paying Jobs

Working-Class Families Are Getting Hit From All Sides

What Will It Take To Solve The Affordable Housing Crisis?

Higher food costs make the math even harder for Americans

Urban Public Schools Need Support

Rents Are Out Of Reach For Most Americans Earning Minimum Wage, A

De-Democratization

Communities facing information-production gatekeeping also face de-democratization processes.

- In the urban scale, **democratic processes and frameworks do not exist**
  - governance has shifted attention **away from citizens, toward economic producers & profit**
  - produces a **"hollowing out of democracy"**

- The city is a site of people subject to
  - leadership **consisting of elitist & corportist interests**
  - hostile change
  - **few viable methods of people's-based power**

De-democratization is **solidified** and **intensified by information-production gatekeeping.**
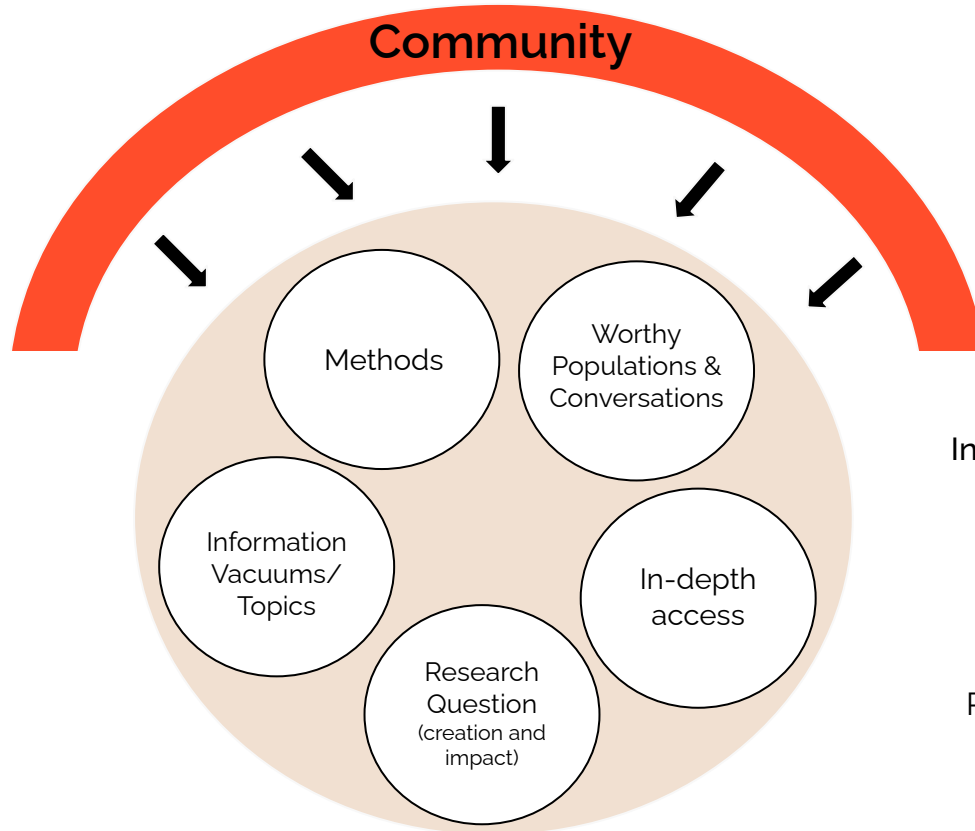
The "Two New Brunswicks" & De-Democratization

De-democratization and political inequality manifest itself in the "Two New Brunswicks"

- **One:** the shiny developed downtown areas, and the more forgotten number
- **Two**: which lacks adequate infrastructure, access to affordable housing, and is reliant on low-wage jobs. The "second version" of is often stigmatized for conditions that are a result of leaders' inefficiencies.

Community Research Using 'Resident Research Coalitions'

Community

'People researching' first, 'research about people' second

Methods

Worthy Populations & Conversations

Information Vacuums/ Topics

In-depth access

Research Question (creation and impact)

Increase social justice advocacy

Strengthen communities' research capacities

Promote successful use of collective time, energy, and confidence.

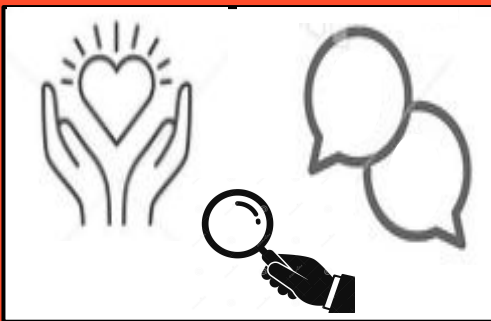# The Community Investigators Project

in partnership with

MIDDLESEX COLLEGE

Combining our thoughts, opinions, and experiences with research to make service projects our community can grow from

Creative Community Photography

Self-Reflection Meets Community Investigating

Executing Our Ideas: Community Outreach Projects

Timeline

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV

Finalize and Complete SAP Funding Proposal,

Create Curriculum Draft

NBT — New Brunswick Tomorrow

Pitch Project to Organizations, Secure Partnership with EMPOWER

Enhance Curriculum Details

Connect with a Non-Profit Mentor

THE LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

Mentor Training and 8-week Program Begins

(1) Community-Building & Goal Orientation
(2) Self-Reflection & Personal Expression using PhotoVoice Research
(3) Community Investigating: Local Social & Political Analysis

Preparation

Community Building & Social Emotional Activities

What do you see here?

Who may be taking this picture? What life story do we think has been captured here?

What do you think the photographer may have been reflecting on?
- About themselves or others
- **Stories**, Experiences, Emotions

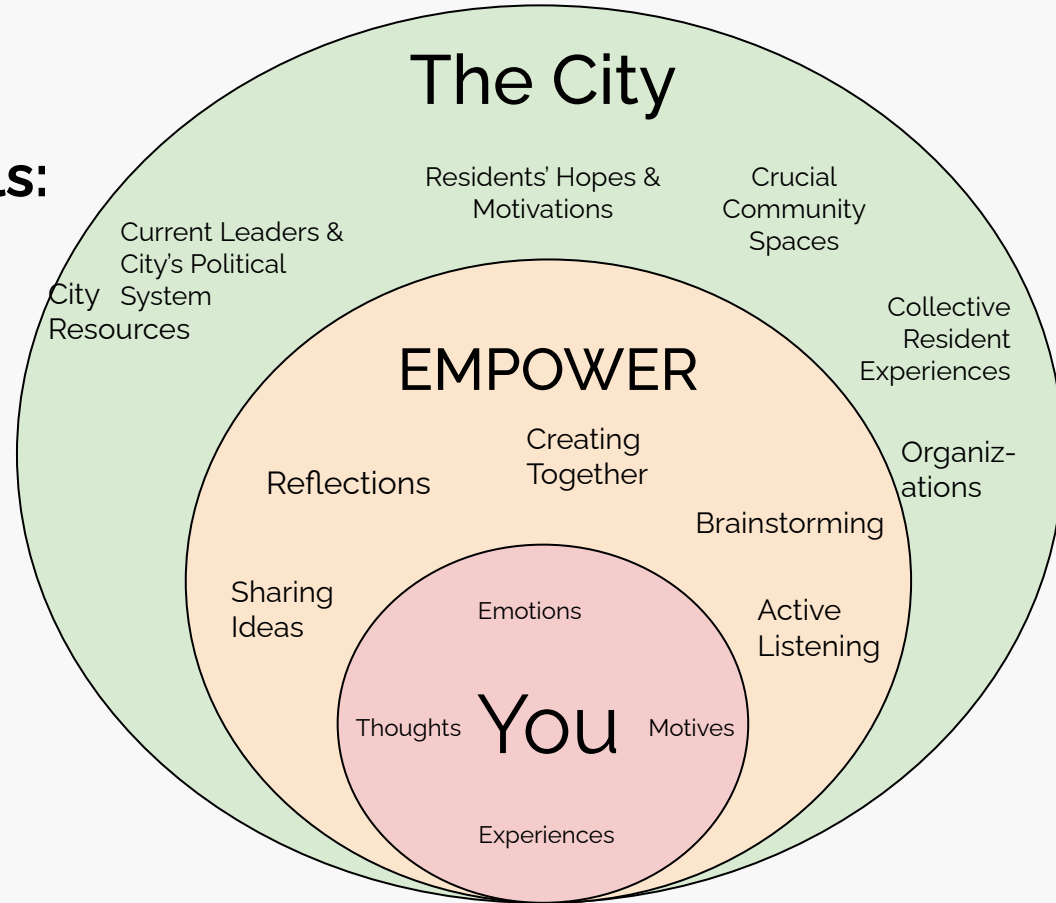What do you think they may have been trying to tell others?

What is really happening in this picture?

Preparation

Discussions:

- What Color Are You Feeling Like Today? What Texture or Pattern Would You Add to Your Description of Your Feelings?

- When Did You First Become Aware That You Wanted to Engage With Your Community & Social Justice?

- What Interested You In This Project?

Visuals:

The City

Residents' Hopes & Motivations

Crucial Community Spaces

Current Leaders & City's Political System

City Resources

Collective Resident Experiences

EMPOWER

Creating Together

Reflections

Organiz-ations

Brainstorming

Sharing Ideas

Active Listening

Emotions

You

Thoughts

Motives

Experiences

Community Photography: 'Photovoice'

Think of photography as an instrument & you're creating the music (conversation).

- Exploration of a problem a community faces.

- Photography provides a powerful way for residents to share these realities & what others need to know/do to protect the community.

- Giving us a medium to vocalize perspectives, experiences, and relationships that can be hard to have.
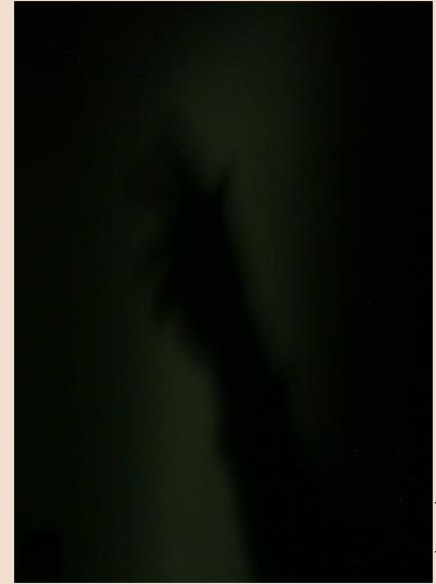
A crack in the door illuminates a call for help

**2** **From Reflections to Community Investigations**

We will turn our pictures into ideas for community outreach !

- Come up with **ideas** for how to turn these **desires** and **questions** into a **project**.

- **Discover where** & **how** our community & peers can be nourished by our ideas.

- **Determine** what more there is to know, what **information** can be useful for us as we make change.

3 # Community Outreach Projects!

Goal: Create and execute a community outreach project that addresses New Brunswick residents' experiences with the social justice area you select.
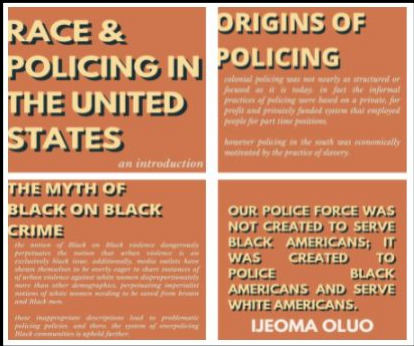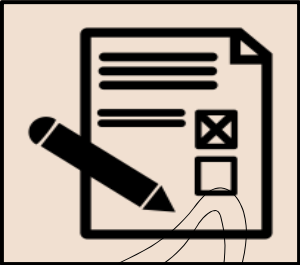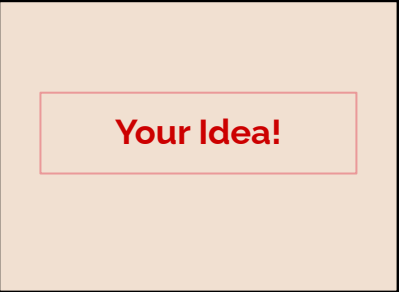

Educational Social Media Campaign

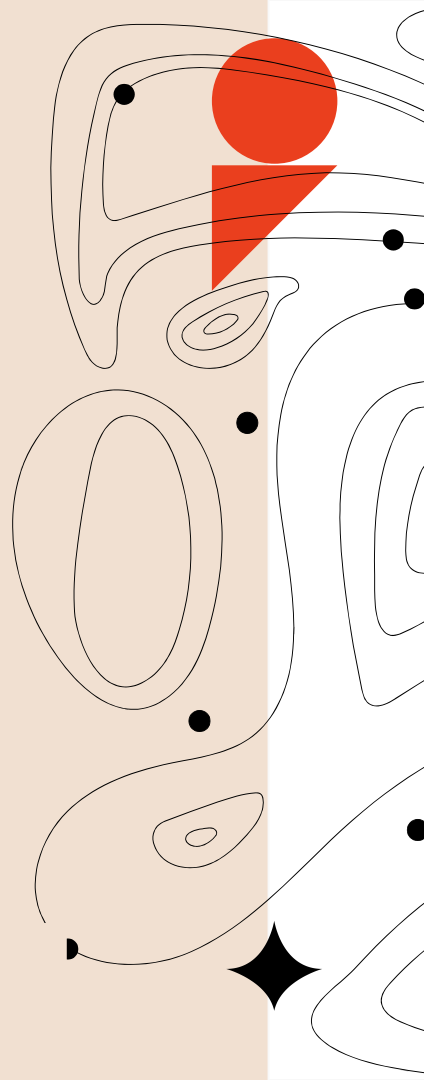Interview a Community Member

Plan a Community Activity

Practice polling people on an issue

Your Idea!

Whatever your photos & reflections draw you to!

Final Projects:

- Informational Pamphlet for NBHS teachers to help tackle students mental health
- Online QR Code services for women to access local affordable quality healthcare services
- Interview RWJ Service Providers
- Brochure for local mental health services

Feminist Leadership

An **accomplished leader** is **not** easily defined as someone who accesses a seat at the table. Effective leaders are defined by their ability to make **room** at tables of power for **others** to lead, **too**.

Impact & Next Steps

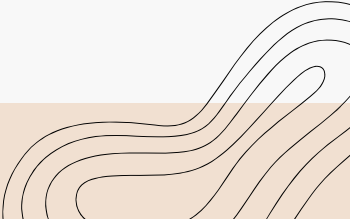Social Justice

Mental Health

EMPOWER

MIDDLESEX COLLEGE
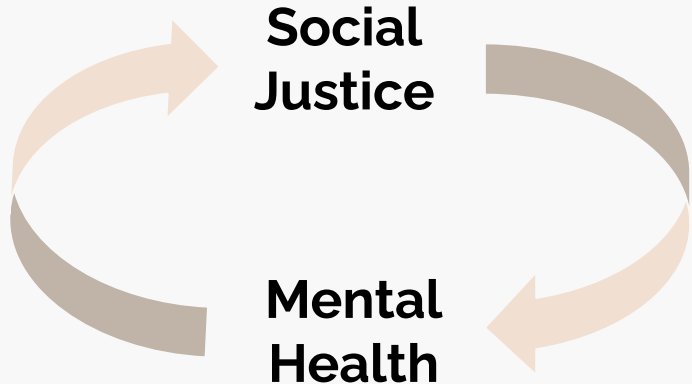
"Saidy was really open to new ideas and made it a comfortable space for discussion"

I enjoyed it was very "at your own pace" but also had structure to keep you on track.

"I plan to continue to work on my project and expand it in the future."

Lessons Learned

- **Strengthen my confidence** to create & share things driven by *my* experiences

- **My ideas matter and I *can* lead** change through personal and community experiences

- **We never stop using our creativity** and we must continue to nurture it to rejoice others and be flexible in moments of strife

- **Establish flexible leadership models** that amplify voices

- **Generate a safe space** where I and others can express our emotions & thoughts

- **Take care of my social and emotional health** to be able to provide welcoming spaces and encouragement for others

THANK YOU

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