

Community Voice for Change: Mental Health

July 2019

Coming Together to Get Ahead
Community Voice for Change

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

St. Vincent de Paul
Waukesha County



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Section 1: A Note from CTGA

Thank you for joining us on our second edition of the Community Voice for Change report. Our team at Coming Together to Get Ahead (CTGA) is very grateful for the opportunity to be able to work so closely with the community on these key issues. **The topic of this report is mental health.**

We knew the topic of mental health would be a heavy, but important one to cover. There is a stigma and sensitivity with this topic that can make it challenging to talk about, along with trying to use the right vocabulary and terms. And yet there were such honest, challenging, and real conversations that took place during our CVC events. **They are captured in this report.**

We started the whole conversation by asking “*What is mental health?*” Many of us were surprised at how our own personal definition immediately went to a negative space, a LACK of strong mental health. When we thought of mental health, we thought of disorders and frustrations. So, we took some time to define what GOOD mental health looks like. Answers from the group included “*knowing how to cope with everyday life,*” “*being stable and happy,*” “*being emotionally and psychologically resilient.*” In

taking that first step to define mental health, we turned to the WHO (World Health Organization), who defines mental health as “*a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.*” The WHO stresses that mental health “*is not just the absence of a mental disorder.*”¹

Once we had a shared understanding of what good mental health was, we dug deeper to explore the barriers and challenges. We looked at how addiction and substance abuse created additional challenges. We explored how it was challenging for both individuals and the community to thrive in this area.

Most of us at the table were not experts on mental health, although we were fortunate to have some join us. What we did have were real, personal experiences and challenges with mental health that we shared in a group, with an eye for change. While there are many different terms used by experts, we chose to use the words “*mental health concern(s)*” in this report, because it encompasses the wide range of experiences and situations discussed. We hope this report provides you with new information and awareness, a greater understanding for personal challenges with mental health, and a motivation to work towards a healthier and more financially stable Waukesha County.

Thank you for being a part of the change, The CTGA team

About CTGA

For those of you unfamiliar with CTGA, it is St. Vincent De Paul program that has been working on individual financial stability and community change in Waukesha County for the last 5 years. We use the Bridges Out of Poverty model in our work. Bridges is a community engagement model which reduces barriers to success posed by economic class differences among people and groups.

CTGA is dedicated to making a difference. In addition to hosting Getting Ahead Workshops for individuals and Poverty Seminars for community members, we are now hosting Community Voice for Change (CVC) events once a month. CVC is an opportunity for everyone to come to the table and share their experiences, with an eye for change. We polled the community to identify the key barriers in Waukesha County that keep people and the community from thriving. These topics rose to the top of the list: Employment, Mental Health, Housing and Transportation. To read more about the structure of CVC, we invite you to view the CVC overview attachment sent with this report.

1. World Health Organization. Retrieved on July 16, 2019, from https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

Section 2: Why are We at the Table

We discuss why it is important to look at mental health concerns in Waukesha County. Everyone must have needed resources to live a stable life. We consider mental health concerns to be barriers for individuals and our community to thrive.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that “approximately 1 in 5 adults in the US experiences a mental illness in a given year.”² That’s 46.6 million people per year.

Close to home, **in Waukesha County**, the findings from the Needs Assessment estimate that within a year, **57,897** adults experience any mental illness. **12,320** adults experience a serious mental illness.¹

We looked at 2017 Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment to address mental health concerns. In this assessment they identified two types of mental health concerns, as it relates to daily function.

The first group identified are those who experience symptoms but are still able to function for the most part of their daily lives.

The second group are individuals who have the symptoms and have daily function impairment.¹

When you look at the numbers (left) relating to the definitions, nearly 60,000 adults in Waukesha County experience **any mental illness**. And regardless of how it impairs daily function, it can be very lonely, frustrating, and challenging.

Then we look at the next number: 12,320. Over 12,000 adults right here in our own community with serious mental illness. They are experiencing the symptoms and have daily function impairment. One CVC participant described as *“being in a fog and not being able to see straight.”* Mental health concerns are keeping them from getting ahead.

We recognize there are many factors that could contribute to which category an individual falls into. Type of illness, severity, access to care, ability to afford care, belief system, past experiences, support network... the list of factors goes on. It is very important to have an awareness of all these components.

So, the question that this brings up is which of these factors are we, as a community, able to support? We cannot remove mental health concerns in our community, as much as we would like to be able to. A key is to have a deeper understanding of mental health in all its aspects. And there are things we can work on when it comes to access to care, affordability and support networks. That begins with a conversation. That begins here.

Our mission is to transform lives and end poverty through systemic change one person, one neighborhood, one community at a time.

1. Waukesha County Health Needs Assessment. Retrieved July 10, 2019, from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>

2. Any Mental Illness (AMI) Among Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved July 10, 2019, from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml#part_154785

Section 3: How is Our Table Unique

We engage those in poverty, the middle and wealth class to share their mental health experiences over dinner. We do this knowing that many people in poverty are problem solvers and people in the middle and wealth class help set up structures and are decision makers.

“The Bridges Out of Poverty model is not a program. Bridges concepts are used to help prevent poverty, support people in transition and create communities where everyone can live well.” (Bridges Out of Poverty) ¹

We use the Bridges model to look at four different causes of poverty:

Individual Behaviors and Circumstances

Community Conditions

Exploitation

Political and Economic Structures



The four causes of poverty are important to understand the barriers in living with mental health disorders. Often, when looking at the causes of poverty, people identify either side of the spectrum as the cause. For mental health, on the individual end it could be *“they just need to take meds”* to the other end of the spectrum, with political and economic structures it could be *“our mental health system isn’t working on a state and national level.”*

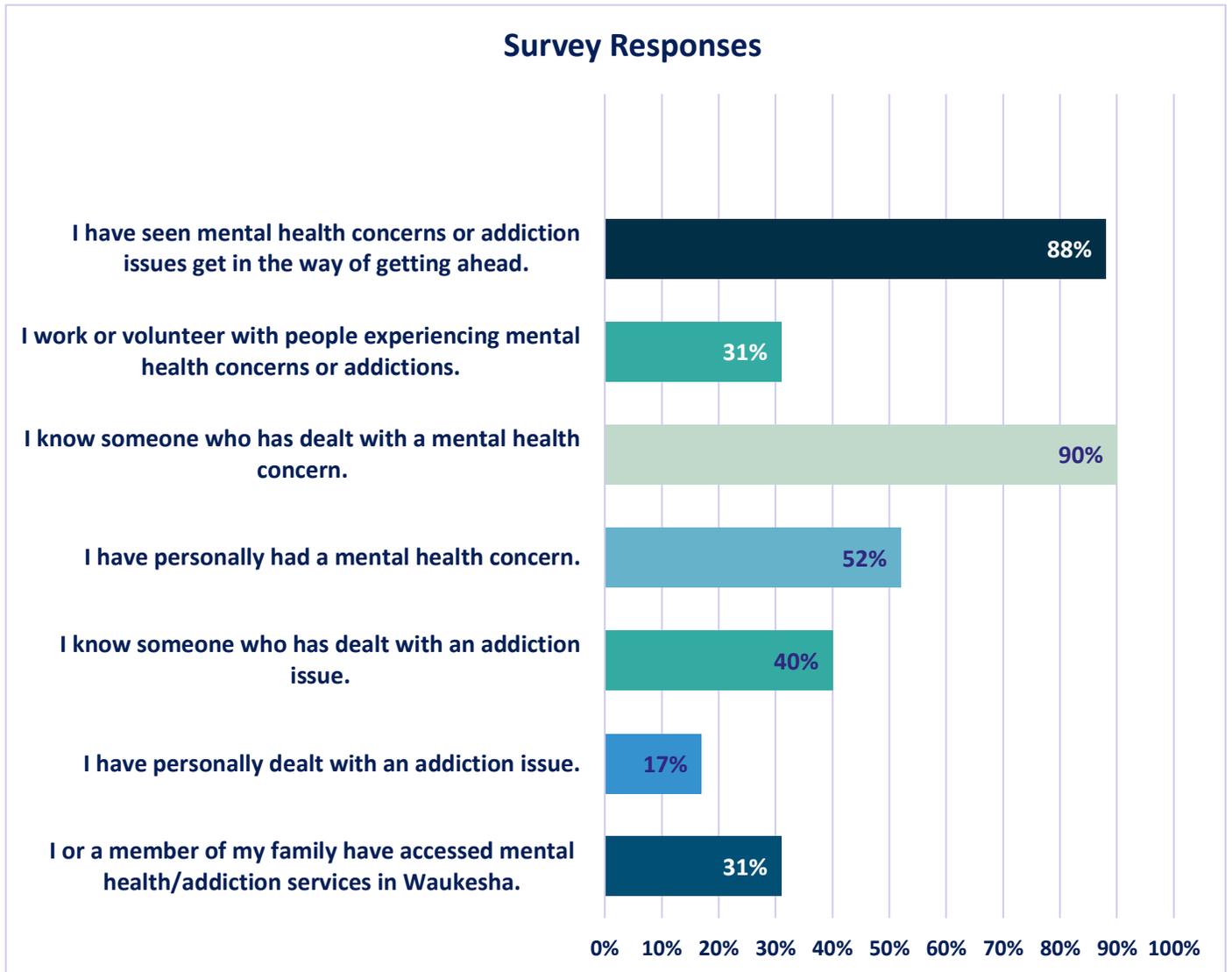
To explore this deeper, we set up an activity at the CVC event, that we call the Poverty Post-It Activity. During this activity, we gave groups different scenarios around mental health and asked each group to assign it to the “correct” cause of poverty category. One example of a post-it was “Mark didn’t take his medication, which affected his work performance.” Some people in the discussion talked about his individual behavior and responsibility. Others wondered what community conditions may have contributed to a stigma around taking medication. Others explored why he didn’t take his medication, perhaps due to costs or insurance, highlighting potential exploitation or political structures. All of the groups struggled to choose just one cause for their scenario- highlighting the fact that all four causes of poverty can contribute to barriers in achieving strong mental health.

1. Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., Philip E. DeVol, Terie Dreussi Smith. Training Supplement for Bridges Out of Poverty.

Section 4: Who's at the Table

Everyone who attended a CVC event on the topic of mental health completed an anonymous survey at the end of each evening. The seven survey items are designed to capture the range of experiences with mental health concerns “in the room”. Some people had a lot of experiences, while others had little. Some people had direct experiences and others had indirect experiences. Individuals checked as many items as applied to themselves.

The graph below captures the experience at a glance.



Each of these categories include many stories of what is going on in our community. It also affirms why we are doing this work. 90% indicated they know someone who has dealt with mental health concerns and 88% have seen it get in the way of getting ahead. It is so prevalent and can be such a barrier.

Section 5: Sharing Our Experiences

Community Voice for Change participants shared their experiences with mental health as it affects getting ahead, being financially stable and thriving in Waukesha County.

“Looking at mental health, what is working in Waukesha county?”

It’s About Resources

“Waukesha County is resource rich.” “Salvation Army provides help for alcoholism. Waukesha County has help for AODA.” “I am aware of a drug and alcohol expert to assist people with AODA and treatment. Also, the state programs.” “NAMI has helped me... NAMI has social workers that work with schools to help find kids with mental health problems find help. It is called Lighthouse Project.” “Organizations like NAMI are very helpful. They give presentations and invite people to groups.” “Waukesha Health and Human Service Department is trying to improve. (Now it is easier to immediately get help/counseling).” “There are a good many non-profits and such available.” “NAMI seems to have a unique idea that may help. Other non-profit agencies are offering support for basic needs.” “I know that there are centers that offer help, for example like the Women Center, Hope Center... Waukesha County has many resources.” “To have more programs like CTGA Hacia Adelante in our community. Programs or groups where people can vent.”

It’s About Reaching Out

“When I looked into finding a counselor I found one right away w/state insurance.” “Seems to me whether or not Waukesha County has adequate resources depends on the person’s individual experiences.” “They are reaching out to the community to see what resources they can use or obtain; knowledge of help in the community previously unknown. We call/send individuals for quick appraisal and establish case management.” “I think that we as a community should take advantage of the resources to minimize these problems, create support centers to integrate them into society and offer them treatment.” “Ask for help from the institutions that work with these things.” “Look for help resources in the community.” “Look for support.” “Programs or groups where people can vent.” “Support groups.” “Look for help.”

It’s About Functioning

“Being able to function in my world as I would like without depression and dealing with others in a civil manner.” “The ability to function independently without a condition of stress; understanding your living conditions; to be able to ask for counselors and talk with them.” “Lack of stress (from financial and emotional) which can be many times, more than what one can handle, lack of overwhelming life change, struggle, burdens, situations, lack of depression.” “Emotional and psychological ability to live a happy and fulfilling life.” “To be able to function at optimum level: rational, reality based, problem solve, perform tasks, ability to function for daily activities, reasonable balances of emotions.”

It’s About Coping

“Ability to cope with daily life; do not rely on drugs or alcohol; be able to hold a job and do the required daily chores in a family, overall health of the brain.” “The ability to handle daily life and the occasional traumas in calm, reasonable ways.” “Knowing how to cope with change and hard situations; allowing oneself to feel emotions but being able to manage without any substances.”

Sharing Our Experiences (Continued...)

“Looking at mental health, what isn’t working in Waukesha County?”

It’s About Money

“Getting individuals help who are poor or dysfunctional is a serious problem.” “It is difficult to access and pay for treatment if you do not have the financial resources to pay for it.” “A mental health disorder can be costly due to hospitalizations, drug addictions, cost of prescription drugs and on-going treatment.”

It’s About Connections

“I know a person who feels completely disconnected from their community and again possibly incapable of ever fitting in or feeling they in.” “Being judged by others or being told you can’t make it.” “Often social resources are withdrawn for people with mental disorders.” “Those coping with mental health concerns often struggle to have healthy supportive relationships they need to get ahead.” “I think our community does not know how to deal with people’s mental health. Sometimes it is easier to ignore it than address it.”

It’s About Coping

“As mental health issues take over more of an individual’s life they have less time for addressing topics such as family or a job. It’s hard to start over.” “They often cannot plan ahead.” “When mental health issues affect personal behavior i.e. the ability to function or perform activities of daily living or work tasks they become barriers just about anywhere.” “Getting ahead requires focus, determination, persistence. If you are not mentally healthy, your energy level, cognition and ability to cope with stressors do not allow you to have these things.” “Mental health affects energy, concentration, problem solving, motivation and the ability to work with others.”

It’s About Jobs

“I know someone who has an anxiety disorder who has difficulty leaving home. Thus, no job. People with mental health concerns have difficulties dealing with co-workers and maintaining relationships.” “May not prevent getting a job or getting a good start but mental health issues make them not sustainable; may also make it impossible to ever get started.” “One may not be able to work at prior, previous levels.”

It’s About Identity and Lack of Understanding

“Mental health concerns become a definition of a person instead of understanding of what a person is in total.” “Having a mental health disorder becomes a means of singling out yourself or being singled out as ‘different’. Having an issue known becomes a barrier when it is used to define a person.” “Many people don’t know they lack good mental health condition.” “A person with mental health issues are not fully comprehensive of their situation or what is happening around them so that is a barrier to getting ahead.” “People with mental health issues can be out of touch with reality.” “Mental health concerns do not allow a person to think.” “In our community, boys are not allowed to express their feelings which might end up in depression or other mental health concerns. Girls are raised to be perfect and our community puts too much pressure on them to be well behaved. Too many expectations of how to feel and what one should do.”

It’s About Access to Services

“I think it’s a larger problem in Waukesha County due to the number of young people being introduced to heroin etc. It leads to the lowering the ability to be productive in the community. There are not enough support services.”

Section 6: Stats That Make Us Think

A recent World Health Organization led study estimated that for every USD\$1 put into scaled up treatment for common mental disorders, there is a return of USD\$4 in improved health and productivity. ¹

In this discussion, we explored if Waukesha County is investing adequately in treatment for mental health and substance abuse concerns. One of the themes that came up was the response of jail rather than treatment. Some in the group said they were unable to find the resources they needed, were put in jail, and continued to re-offend due to lack of treatment. On the flip side, others shared that when they needed help, they were able to find the resources they needed in the community. NAMI was frequently mentioned as a great resource people in the group accessed. On both sides of the coin, the group agreed it largely relied on the individual realizing there was a problem and advocating for the needed resources, which is frequently a big barrier.

Another recent World health Organization led study estimates that depression and anxiety cost the global economy US\$1 trillion dollars each year in lost productivity. ¹

As a group, we explored how we have seen or experienced loss of productivity in the workplace. We also looked at why productivity was important and what employers can do to support it. There were quite a few examples in our own community of this loss of productivity due to depression and anxiety. People shared they had seen coworkers too anxious to focus on the work that needs to be done. There was also a lot of shared experience in seeing addiction and substance abuse interfere with productivity in the workplace. One strongly echoed sentiment during the discussion was the frustration for those needing to pick up the additional workload from the individual experiencing mental health concerns and the loss of sales/bottom line for the company. There needs to be a balance between running a productive business and also being compassionate and caring for those with mental health concerns.

Another statistic from National Center for Biotechnology Information shared- “Adults in debt were three times more likely than those not in debt to have CMD [common mental disorders]. The increased likelihood of CMD among those in arrears was found for all CMD and was irrespective of source of debt—housing, utilities and purchases on credit. The situation was exacerbated among those with addictive behaviors—alcohol or drug dependence or problem gambling.” ²

In this section, we looked at the correlation between mental health concerns and debt. There was very engaging discussion about which comes first (think Chicken or the Egg) in terms of mental health concerns causing debt or debt causing mental health concerns. For example, some shared situations of large debt causing severe stress and leading to depression. On the flip side, others had seen mental health concerns like anxiety, addiction and OCD lead to excessive spending. Along with that, an inability to hold a job due to a mental health concern added to debt. Heavy insurance bills, including those who are un-or under-insured for mental health treatment, was also cited as a cause of debt.

1. World Health Organization. Retrieved on July 16, 2019, from https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/

2. *Eur J Public Health*. 2013 Feb;23(1):108-13. doi: 10.1093/eurpub/cks021. Epub 2012 Mar 20. Retrieved on July 16, 2019, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22434207>

Section 7: Stories of Mental Health

We asked people to share their own personal stories of mental health. These stories highlight the impact that mental health has on our ability to thrive. The stories make the point that mental health can be affected by our situation, our connections and the resources we call on for stability.

A Story of Mental Health Decisions

“In general, I was not impacted by mental health issues until midlife when I encountered several periods of time when I felt there was no use trying to work on certain parts of my life... I might as well give up. One day I was stopped at a driveway, ready to turn onto the road and I had an impulse to just gun the accelerator and cross the road into a ditch and be done. I realized this was a major wake up call. I was fortunate to seek help and with treatment for depression was able to regain mental wellness. After a while I asked about going off meds. The doctor’s response was “You are well, why would you tamper with that?” Discussions with my doctors over the years have confirmed to me the importance of using and adjusting medication if it is necessary for mental illness as well as physical illness.”

A Story of Stress, Sadness, Help and Faith

“My personal experience regarding mental health in my own person is economically driven, when I am unable to pay my debts even though I am working. This causes me stress and depression. But thanks to the help I get from Waukesha County I have been able to control my anxieties and my stress levels have decreased a lot. But, also what has been happening in my home country Venezuela causes me some stress because my country is going through a very sad and chaotic situation and that really affects me. In addition, my father who lives in Venezuela is unable to come here for those reasons and that stresses me further, it makes me depressed and affects my mental health. However, thanks to my religious beliefs and my faith in god it calms me, it gives me peace of mind and hope that everything will get resolved with positivity and a happy ending. This helps my mental health. In addition, thanks to the help of St Joseph I have therapies and medications to help control my anxieties. In progress.” (Translated from Spanish)

A Story of Coping with a Mental Health Condition

“I don’t know if I was born with panic attacks, but they certainly developed living in a household with an abusive alcoholic. Because of panic attacks, I did not start driving until I was 29 years old. Work was limited to where I could walk. After getting my license I was doing well and enjoying work outside my walking area. Unfortunately, my panic attacks did not go away but came back with a vengeance. The panic found a new target. I had nightmares and lost days of sleep. My fear was now focused on losing my spouse. A hospital stay was almost needed but new medications seemed to help. The long-term problem is that I will be on meds forever because stopping them has increased the attacks. Now maintaining my meds is needed along with emergency meds for flare up attacks.”

A Story of Resources, Mental Re-Set and Patience

“My experience with mental health begins in Waukesha County, while living here, I went through a very difficult situation where I lost my job. I didn’t have money to pay rent and other living costs. Which in turn made me fall into depression and I developed insomnia. However, I received help in Waukesha County and was able to get ahead. In addition, I sought help with a therapist to mentally reset myself. I also know a coworker who suffers from depression and she sometimes neglects her job and has been close to getting fired, but the bosses have been very patient with her.” (Translated from Spanish)

Section 8: Program Spotlight

{ We talked to a local non-profit in our community that was identified by the group as being crucial to our work on mental health. }

NAMI of Waukesha County

We spoke to Mary Madden, Executive Director of NAMI of Waukesha County...

1. What do you see, regarding mental health, with people coming to your program?

Stigma still seems to be the number one issue that deters people from seeking early intervention for mental health issues. Additionally, the service delivery system is complex and fragmented and often people don't know where to start. They become frustrated with not knowing where to go for the services that they need. People affected by their own mental health condition, or that of a loved one, often feel embarrassed and feel isolated. They seek services at NAMI Waukesha to engage with people who have "been there" and find a community of compassion, understanding and acceptance. We are seeing increasing numbers of people who want to learn more about mental health conditions and suicide. They are interested in solving the problem of stigma and helping the larger community understand and accept mental health conditions as they would any other medical condition.

2. Services that we offer:

NAMI Waukesha offers outstanding peer-directed programs in education and support. These non-cost programs support families, individuals living with mental illness, and the general public. For those living with mental illness we offer NAMI Peer-to-Peer, Peer Support, Support Groups, Chapter 51/55 Court Support & Advocacy Program. For individuals who are living with mental illness and experiencing homelessness we offer PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) and SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery Program). For those who have loved ones who are living with mental illness we offer NAMI Family-to-Family, NAMI Basics, One-on-One Support from Family Peer Mentors, Support Groups, and Chapter 51/55 Court Support & Advocacy Program. For anyone who is interested in learning more about mental illness we have programs such as Ending the Silence, Stories of Hope and others. Our services are offered at no-cost to the individual. Some programs do require advance registration, but support groups do not. Contact the office for more information.

3. **Best contact information for those who want help or to learn more:** Call our offices at 262-524-8886 to find out more information or visit our website at www.namiwaukesha.org.

Section 9: What's Next

{ We discuss options on what you can do to further the conversation on mental health and
invite you to our next topic on housing. }

This report is being distributed to over 600 individuals and organizations in our community, including non-profits, churches, businesses, schools, and elected officials.

What can you do?

- Continue the conversation and share this report. Use this report for awareness and understanding. Share it with those close to you and those in your community.
- If this issue, and report, sparked something for you – look for ways to get involved. There are a lot of great organizations in our community doing this work.
- Learn more about your local, elected officials and their take on these issues. Engage them to work with us for change. Vote!
- Work for change. In your own life. In your own family and friends. In your community.

What topic is up next for CVC: Housing

Wednesday, July 24th
Wednesday, August 28th
Wednesday, September 25th

**These events are located at First United Methodist Church,
121 Wisconsin Ave in Waukesha, from 6-8pm**

To join us for any/all of these evenings, or if you have any questions, please contact our office at 262-547-0654 or ctga@svdpwaukesha.com