

Students, Faculty Collaborate on Community Research

The report, titled “Building Safe Communities through Strong Partnerships in the Canal,” is collaboration between Dominican, Canal Alliance, DataCenter, and Voces Del Canal, a coalition of resident leaders from the Canal neighborhood.

The residents recently presented their research findings, priority recommendations, and strategies for promoting community development and revitalization during a meeting with local agencies and officials at Dominican.

Read the report: www.datacenter.org/new-report-released-voces-del-canal/

The research project began about two years ago when Julia van der Ryn, director of [Dominican’s service-learning program](#), and Jennifer Lucko, an assistant professor of education, received funding from Dominican’s Strategic Initiative Grant program to examine how the University could contribute to community revitalization in the Canal neighborhood.

In the initial months of the project, Dominican students conducted interviews with nonprofit and county agencies serving the Canal district to collect qualitative data regarding services provided, demographics served, and perceptions regarding gaps in and barriers to access services.

“In dialogue with our partners in the Canal, we identified the need for a more holistic approach to our work – one that is driven by residents, especially those whose voices are rarely heard,” van der Ryn said. “Our goal as an institution is to create partnerships that provide sustainable and valuable community-engaged educational experiences and make meaningful contributions to the canal community and further equity in Marin.”

To address this need for meaningful community engagement and to leverage local knowledge, Dominican contacted DataCenter, a national training and resource center. DataCenter guided residents through a “Research Justice” framework to develop their skills as informed, confident leaders to become effective advocates for the community.

DataCenter facilitated training workshops to teach the residents participatory action research methods and build on existing leadership skills. Over the course of five weeks, the resident leaders conducted 678 resident survey interviews. Residents also held focus groups to share data findings with community organizations and to gather additional perspectives.

Throughout the research development, implementation and analysis, the residents engaged local families in discussions about neighborhood concerns and conducted a critical analysis of key issues impacting the community using this information and the research data.

“Our hope is that we as a campus, in conjunction with key community leaders and stakeholders, will come together to take action steps in response to the residents' findings and recommendations,” van der Ryn said.

June 11, 2014