

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About Us

### Impact Monterey County

Impact Monterey County (IMC), is a collaborative effort of non-profits, businesses, public agencies, and the community working together to identify the most effective ways to improve life in Monterey County. IMC has been employing multiple outreach and engagement strategies to shine a light on our communities – our quality of life – particularly related to *education, income (economic self-sufficiency) and health*. The benefit of this collaborative effort will be the alignment of stakeholders toward common goals and measurements that improve conditions for all.

### United Way Monterey County

United Way Monterey County is a nonprofit organization formed in June 2000 by the merger of United Way of Monterey Peninsula, founded in 1929, and the United Way of Salinas Valley, founded in 1944. The mission of United Way Monterey County (UWMC) is to engage the community and focus resources to improve lives in Monterey County. Funding from UWMC provides the underpinnings of a vast network of services to county residents.

As a community partner with diverse relationships among donors, service providers, and volunteers, UWMC plays a key role in supporting and advancing the network of resources and services dedicated to community well-being. UWMC improves quality of life for all who live and work in Monterey County by: *Education*: Providing the resources to and support to help children succeed in school from the cradle past high school graduation; *Income*: Teaching people the skills needed to support themselves and their families and bolstering their independence; *Health*: Helping families, children and youth to live safe, healthy lives, develop their full potential and contribute positively to society.

### Introduction to Community Conversations

The Community Conversations (CC) are part of Impact Monterey County's 4-part community assessment effort which was carried out from July 2014 through March 2015. The CC are a series of facilitated group interviews of community members led by IMC volunteers, based on the Harwood Institute's Community Conversations methods.<sup>2</sup> The Harwood method puts an emphasis on asking for people's hopes and aspirations for their community.<sup>3</sup> After the conversations, common themes are then looked for across the various conversations that are held.

The CC are one of two tools that IMC used to discover the hopes and needs of the residents of Monterey County during the county-wide assessment. Surveys were the other tool; an Adult

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<sup>2</sup> Harwood, the Institute for Public Innovation

<sup>3</sup> Also the basis for Adult and Youth Community Assessment Survey design

Experiences and Aspirations Survey (AS) which garnered over 4000 valid surveys, and a Youth Survey (YS) of 11<sup>th</sup> graders in the Monterey County, which was completed by over 2900 individuals.

## **Methodology**

### **Population of Focus**

The population of focus for this assessment included anyone who lives and/or works in Monterey County. Efforts were made to ensure that participation was as close as possible to the age, gender, racial, and socio-economic profile of Monterey County. Due to the qualitative and intensive nature of the CC, (as is true with other qualitative data efforts), methods were employed to approximate sampling --it was decided that 60-80 conversations of 5-10 people each, covering communities throughout the county and based on different kinds of groups (students, parents, employees, job seekers, etc.) would allow for an appropriate representation of the population of focus. As it ensued, the number of women was an over-representation of the population (75% rather than 48%). Other demographics of the participants were more in line with the Census data for Monterey County. It is not unusual for this kind of assessment to vary from assessments in which sampling or weighting can be applied. This sample of participants may be considered a valid representation of the people of this county.

CC participants were solicited to attend a conversation through two methods. The first was through open enrollment on the community events platform Eventbrite. For these open conversations, two hour time slots were reserved at local libraries around the county. In each location, multiple conversations were scheduled at various times to ensure that people with different work schedules were reached. These conversations were open to the public, and were advertised on Eventbrite with a calendar and link to sign up on the IMC website.

The second method utilized the “social capital” of staff and volunteers to schedule conversations at private homes and key organizations. These conversations relied heavily on the social and professional networks of “conversation hosts” who would invite their friends, colleagues, and other associates to come together and share their aspirations for the community in a private setting. Conversation hosts were frequently United Way staff, or members of the community who volunteered through the IMC website. In addition, using the method of conversation “hosts”, staff of public and private organizations and nonprofits invited their employees and beneficiaries to participate in a conversation hosted at their place of business or another location nearby.

In all conversations, demographic information of the participants was recorded, on a voluntary basis, to track how representative the participant population would be. Information gathered included gender, race, age, household income and size, zip code of residence, Hispanic ethnicity, amount of time they have lived in MC, and primary spoken language.

## **Protocol**

Community conversations were held in comfortable, inviting settings and typically included 5-15 participants. The conversations customarily lasted around an hour and a half and were guided by a facilitator to cover key topics in the areas of education, health and income. Each conversation was manually recorded by a note taker whose job it was to record everything that was said. In no instance did the note taker act as facilitator, or facilitator act as note taker. Facilitators and note takers consisted of staff from IMC member organizations and volunteers who registered through the IMC website. Training of all facilitators and note takers was conducted in one session by Tim McManus of Communities Organized for Relative Power in Action (COPA). The training employed the IMC Conversations Guide, previously mentioned.

In a community conversation the facilitator and note taker would arrive early to set up the room and refreshments. Each participant was provided with a name tag, a list of ground rules, and an outline of the general questions. The facilitator would open with an explanation about IMC and the purpose of the CC. The conversation would begin with a general question about participants' perceptions about what makes a good community. The facilitator would gradually direct the conversation to gather more targeted information in the areas of education, health, and income, while still leaving room for any other topics that the participants wanted to raise. At the close of the conversation, the floor was opened for any additional comments or topics that had not been raised. At the end of the conversation, demographic information was collected from each participant.

Following each conversation the note taker and facilitator jointly completed a memo about the conversation using a memo tool designed to elucidate relevant themes and key topics from the conversation.

## **Surfacing Themes**

Following the collection, recording and organizing of all the comments and stories shared in the conversations, a day-long "experimental" session was held, with Tim McManus from COPA as leader, to allow for a review of all that was heard. Twelve facilitators and/or note takers participated. Most were United Way staff. All comments and stories were copied to note papers, and by discussion and consensus, the notes were categorized into themes. This process parallels the research method of content analysis, in which open-ended question responses are analyzed. This intensive process allows those present to get a sense of both the quantity of comments in a topic and also the quality or depth of meaning of a comment or story. Major themes emerged within the areas of education, health and income during this day-long session.

In a separate session, NRC consultants mirrored this activity to determine themes in the "Other" area. Included were experiences, challenges, and hopes elicited outside the three main areas of Education, Income and Health. Three themes emerged from this process.

When themes are agreed upon in this way, it provides a valuable guide to efforts like IMC in capturing the most important facets of our community life for *this particular community* and a basis for creating a road map, so to speak, for moving forward.

The major findings of the CC can be seen in the following instructive themes within which the voices and stories fit:

### Cross-cutting Themes

- *People Connected and Engaged*
- *Safe Neighborhoods*
- *Accessible and Affordable Transportation*

### Area Themes: Education, Health and Income

#### Education

- *Educational opportunities that*
- *Have a whole person approach*
- *are of high quality*
- *are locally accessible*
- *are culturally sensitive*
- *are taught with competence and caring,*
- *support their economic stability,*
- *serve all stages of life.*

#### Health

- *environment is designed to*
- *support people's efforts to live healthfully through*
- *timely factual information and quality services as well as provide*
- *access to low and no-cost facilities/services as needed.*

#### Income

- *treats workers respectfully and*
- *provides employment opportunities that*
- *enable them to earn a living wage so they can*
- *afford good housing and child care for their families.*