Balsz Community Scan

Part A

The Story of Our Community

.... Building pathways of success for our children and youth

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Introduction

"A conversation is not so much about the future of the community …
but is the future itself" (Peter Block, 2008, p. 146)

Dear Balsz Community Member,

Welcome to a conversation about the youth of our community. Welcome to a story of hope.

Working together, we can do much to help our children succeed. We can create conversations about how we all can help. As we talk, new ideas will blossom. We can discover new things that can be done to create a better future for our youth, for ourselves, and for our community.

This booklet is for you. It is a call to action. The booklet is designed to have you reflect on our community’s youth, and what we can all do to support them.

Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) has made a commitment to help Balsz children succeed. It has asked ASU’s Partnership for Community Development (PCD) to create conversation in the community about its youth, and what might be done to maximize the success of its youth. During the first half of 2012, the PCD held conversations with over 130 Balsz school children, parents, teachers, school administrators, other residents and community leaders.* Twelve major themes emerged, and they are offered in this booklet.

But those conversations were only a starting point. We now turn to you. The conversation needs to be broadly expanded. What do you think? What are your ideas? How can we all work better together to help our children succeed? The booklet gives you ideas of what your neighbors are saying, and it gives you some ideas of what the youth themselves are saying. But most importantly, it asks YOU for YOUR ideas. And it provides a way for sharing your ideas with your neighbors!

So again, welcome to the conversation! Your ideas are important and will truly help our children succeed! They are counting on you. We are counting on each other! Turn the page, join your neighbors, and begin to build the story of hope!

*Note: this booklet is Part A of a three-part “Balsz Community Scan” funded by Valley of the Sun United Way. Part B provides details on the research findings summarized in this booklet. Part C provides a comprehensive community profile. All three are available at the Partnership for Community Development website (pcd.asu.edu).
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Our Community

Our community, defined by the boundaries of the Balsz Elementary School District, is full of dreams. 89 nonprofit organizations, 23 neighborhood groups, 9 public and charter schools, 9 faith institutions...

What are the key assets of the community? The map below gives only a hint of them.

Did you know?

• Balsz stretches over an area of 5,900 football fields.
• Nearly 30,000 people call our community their home.
• There are 8,000 children and youth among us.
• Our community is acclaimed to be as diverse as the United Nations.
• Poverty levels in Balsz are twice as high as the Arizona average. One out of every three people live in poverty.
• Residents generally like their neighbors and feel that they can count on them for help. They explain the positive relationships in phrases like 'positive vibes'.
• At the same time, some people report that they do not feel a part of the community.

Source: City of Phoenix Neighborhood Services Department
is Our Pride

nd opportunity. Nearly 30,000 people call our community home. Add 960 businesses, communities, and a community college, and we certainly have a dynamic and thriving community. member, the greatest community assets are the people of our community. Together, we can do a lot children succeed.

Our Points of Pride

- Balsz community members can quickly identify many “points of pride” – things they like about the community. Among them:

1. People (neighbors, families, school staff, and leaders of neighborhood associations)

2. Organizations (BESD schools, Gateway Community College, Educare, Discovery Triangle, Terros, Businesses, coming Boys and Girls Club)

3. Programs (After-school tutoring, Coffee Talks, Kith ‘n Kin, Police presence)

4. Environment (Pierce Park, Phoenix Botanical Garden and Phoenix Zoo, Papago Park, public transportation, and the community’s location in the heart of the Phoenix area).
A healthy community builds strong relationships, formulates its vision, and seeks a better future. Research has shown that every healthy community is a tightly woven community where (a) relationships are strong and (b) conversations are plentiful about the community’s hopes and dreams.

1. Builds Strong Relationships

It is no coincidence that the words ‘community’ and ‘communication’ have the same root. When community members talk to each other frequently and respectfully about their dreams, they create an atmosphere of trust. Though that trust, new projects and partnerships are easily imagined, organized and implemented.

2. Formulates a Community Vision

A community that seeks a better future must be open to change. In order to ensure that the changes are positive, the community should be guided by a common vision of its hopes and dreams.

A vision can be thought of as both a destination and a road map. It outlines what we want to accomplish as well as steps that we need to take. The bigger the buy-in there exists in the community for a vision, the greater are the community’s strides towards it.

(1) How do you build strong relationships?

(2) How do you build respect and trust?

(3) What are your hopes and dreams for the Balsz community?

(4) What are your hopes and dreams for the children of the Balsz community?
Healthy Community?

Effectively taps its resources, and takes action by building community partnerships.

3. Effectively Taps its Resources

Every community has tremendous assets, assets that can be mobilized to help achieve its vision. These assets include its people, its places, its organizations, and its existing programs and services.

Research shows that the most successful communities are not simply those with abundant resources – but rather are those that identify and capitalize on what they already have. So the question is not: ’What do we lack?’ The question must be: ’How can we benefit from what we already have?’

VOICE

(5) Look at the map on pages 4-5 of this Scan. How can we best utilize these resources in order to help children and youth?

(6) What does working together mean to you?

(7) How can we work better together to serve our children and youth?

4. Acts Collaboratively

Healthy communities are very effective in building relationships among community assets to give birth to creative partnerships and collaborations. Based on the idea that “we are better together”, new partnerships become a force to build resources in a community and move it forward.

Collaborations between residents, informal groups, and organizations work on the principle of “gift-sharing”. Translated: ”If I cannot do something well, maybe you can! By working together, we can do more!”
The Key Questions

You might be tempted to quickly flip through opening pages of this booklet but PLEASE HOLD ON BEFORE YOU DO! By reading this booklet you are joining an important and ongoing conversation about the future of our community, and especially about the future of our children. YOU bring amazing insights and gifts to our community – all of which can help our community a better place to live.

So, whenever you see the words ‘YOUR VOICE’ in this booklet, feel free to enter your insights. Then, share your insights with your family, neighbors and friends. In other words, join the conversation! Please begin with the set of questions below. These are the questions that were used to guide earlier community conversations that lead to the creation of this booklet.

YOUR VOICE

What are the points of pride in Balsz?

What are your dreams and hopes for our community?

What things are not working well in our community?

How can our children and youth be better served?

As a community, what are we telling our children and youth about success?

What should we be saying about success?

How can people and organizations work together to make this a great community?
Chapters of the Balsz Story

Every story has a beginning. The beginning of this story is what over 130 community members have said in response to the questions on page 9 during community conversations in early 2012. Many ideas were expressed about the hopes and dreams we all have for our community, and its children and youth.

This booklet offers a story of what was shared in those conversations. The story is divided into twelve chapters – one for each of the major themes that emerged. Each chapter summarizes the major messages for each theme. But importantly, it welcomes you into the story and asks you to grow it by sharing your ideas!

- Chapter 1 - Our Kids: Our Hope
- Chapter 2 - Believing in Children & Youth
- Chapter 3 - Pathways to Success
- Chapter 4 - The Nurturing Family
- Chapter 5 - The Nurturing School
- Chapter 6 - The Nurturing Neighborhood
- Chapter 7 - It Really Does Take a Village
- Chapter 8 - Enriching the Experiences
- Chapter 9 - Hubs of Engagement
- Chapter 10 - Linking Together
- Chapter 11 - Growing Leaders
- Chapter 12 - Engaging Children & Youth
- Chapter 1 -
Our Kids: Our Hope

**YOUR VOICE**
What comes to your mind when you think of children and youth in our community?

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**Insights from Community Conversations**

- Our children and youth are full of energy, capable, and fun. However, their basic human needs, such as access to food or health care, are often not satisfied. They often lack the support and skills to achieve their goals in life.

- Parents are aware of the difficulties surrounding a child’s transition into being a teen. After 5th grade, there are misunderstandings and challenges in school. Test scores begin to drop. The children seem to need more help so that they do not fall behind.

- Parents want children to succeed and want to see hope for their future. At the same time, many of them are trying hard to make ends meet, and busy work schedules often prevent them from providing good supervision. The children need caring and positive adult role models, otherwise they are likely to make bad choices in life.

**A Day in the Life of a Balsz Kid**

Peter, an 11-year-old, wakes up at 6:30 am, finding his breakfast on the table. His father is already gone, and his mother is just leaving for work. Peter takes the school bus to school. He really likes coming to school, but finds some classes difficult. School ends at 3 pm. Peter hangs out with his friends in the park, but he would much rather play soccer in a league. He gets home at 6 pm. Peter turns on the TV and tries to work on his homework. He asks his mother for help but unfortunately she cannot help him because she never studied the topic before. Peter goes to bed at 10 pm.

- Hypothetical Story
The Buzz of the Community

How do people describe children and youth in Balsz?

Children are the happiness of the home; teenagers are a headache.

If you could only see how curious they are about so many things - they only need the skills and support to help them achieve what they want.

I am grateful to be a parent that can stay home with kids to be a good parent.

I see kids that are very, very capable.

Children want to be heard.

I think they are challenged ... and courageous.

I see kids with a ton of energy and a ton of hopefulness.

When kids come to school hungry, they fall asleep as soon as they get here - it happens a lot.

Teachers and school staff

The children need more attention.

Other adults in our community

Parents

Children want to be heard

I think they are challenged ... and courageous

I see kids with a ton of energy and a ton of hopefulness

When kids come to school hungry, they fall asleep as soon as they get here - it happens a lot.

YOUR VOICE
What can we do together to improve the living conditions of our children and youth?

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Chapter 2
Believing in Children & Youth

Insights from Community Conversations

- Children and youth want to hear more words of encouragement from adults. They want to be recognized as distinct individuals and want to be treated with respect. They also seek guidance, support, and understanding of their lifestyle.

- Students appreciate the encouraging messages that they receive from adults, especially when adults thank them for something they helped with in the neighborhood. Some children and youth mentioned that parents and teachers have high expectations for them.

- At the same time, children and youth encountered misunderstandings, discouragement, stereotypes, and even fear from adults. According to the youth, some adults see children and youth as bullies, gangsters-to-be, and generally a cause of disorder in the community.

Sending the Right Messages

How we talk to our young people influences their life choices. Our messages are like a lighthouse that draws ships on their way to a destination. What are the messages we send? Are they clear enough? Are we successful in helping the ships find their way out of a storm? In the Balsz community, there seems to be a mix of positive and negative messages that adults are sending to youth in our community. What messages do we want them to hear?

YOUR VOICE
In your opinion, how do adults treat youth in our community?

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12
The Buzz of the Community

What Our Children Want to Hear

They can let us know that they are on our team

They should be encouraging us more

I want to hear: ‘I hope you’ll be successful!’

They should keep inspiring us to keep trying because even if you’re not doing good right now, you will be better later

What Adults Tell Them

You are smart and beautiful

You have no future!

You have superpowers!

I am glad I didn’t grow up in your generation!

They raised you right

You can get out of here!

The messages are mixed

YOUR VOICE

What can our community do to send more positive messages to our youth?

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- Chapter 3 -
Pathways to Success

YOUR VOICE
How would you define “success” for our children?

Insights from Community Conversations

• Adults define success in many ways. Some focus on tangible things like completing college, getting a job, working toward a career, or being debt-free. Others focus on more abstract things like achieving life goals. Some know that completing college can be important, but many do not see this goal as the only way to be successful in life.

• Many children and youth have parents, teachers and other adults in their life who give good advice on how to be successful - such as to work hard at school, not quit, keep focused, never stop learning, and be accountable. Unfortunately, not all young people receive such words of advice.

• Many parents want to help their children be successful by being sources of encouragement and support. Some would like to help with homework and create a good environment where children can play and be themselves. Oftentimes, however, parents do not know how to help their children.

Finding the Way

One adult from the community has noticed that some students in junior high want to get vocational training instead of going to college. He observed: “In my mind, I thought it was a shame because they could be going to college. But then I think, for these girls, it’s a career for them and that in a few years they’ll probably have kids, and they’ll be able to support them.”
The Buzz of the Community

There are a variety of pathways to success:

- Job Training and Apprenticeships
- Being Mentored to Run a Local Business
- Going to and Graduating from College

Whatever success means to the individual! It might mean taking classes about photography, or decorating, or welding. For some people it may mean taking college classes.

YOUR VOICE

What, in your opinion, are the best pathways to success for our youth?
- Chapter 4 -
The Nurturing Family

**YOUR VOICE**
What does the phrase ‘nurturing family’ mean to you?

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**Insights from Community Conversations**

• A lot of families struggle financially. Low-income families lack access to healthy food, extracurricular activities for children, health care, and transportation options. These troubles have worsened during the recent economic recession.

• Many families are struggling simply to get by from day to day with bare necessities. This creates a focus on short-term survival goals and diverts families from the big picture need to help their children find pathways for success.

• All parents want their children to succeed, but they often do not know how to help them. Many parents have difficulties with English, and some are illiterate. Also, many parents have not had any experience with college or trade schools and do not know how to help the children learn more about these options.

**Focus on Home Ownership**

The recent economic recession has had a negative effect on home ownership. The majority (70%) of Balsz families are now renters rather than homeowners (30%). One community member put it this way: "I want people to have the resources to fix their houses. I don't mean in a pretty way but there are a lot of children that don't have air conditioning and that sort of thing. For our kids, I think it screams: 'low expectations'".
Community Conversations

What do people say about families in our community?

Parents really care about their children despite the difficult economic challenges.

Families in poverty don't really send that message that education is of high value.

Since Balsz has some low-income areas, those children aren't given the chance to learn and operate the same ways that more privileged children are able to get.

So much rides on parents' involvement and engagement ... Parents' attention makes all the difference, and I wish that this was known more.

The classes are in English, and some parents do not understand and cannot help.

Parents know their children need the help; they just can't provide it... In a sense we need to teach parents to be teachers.

YOUR VOICE

How can we support families in our community so that they can provide the best conditions at home to help their children succeed?
- Chapter 5 -
The Nurturing School

YOUR VOICE
How do schools contribute to the success of children and youth?

Insights from Community Conversations

• Schools in the community, including Gateway Community College, are seen as safe places and points of pride in the community. Children and youth trust teachers at school. However, the community would like schools to be even more engaged in organizing extracurricular activities.

• Due to lack of resources and language barriers, some children find it difficult to succeed in schools. A vast majority of students receive free or reduced lunches at school. Teachers offer homework clubs and even provide one-on-one tutoring, but some of the students still struggle.

• Teachers and parents want to collaborate with each other, but there are barriers in communication and lack of experience on how to do this well. Parents would appreciate more communication from teachers, and teachers would like to see parents be more involved in their children’s lives.

Extended School Year

Balsz Elementary School District schools have an extended school year of 200 days. Community members tend to feel that this positively influences the children’s learning. Also, many parents appreciate the fact that their children are now provided supervision 20 additional days in the year. At the same time, some individuals wish that the school year would be shorter. On August 5, 2012, Balsz schools were featured in a New York Times article titled ‘To Increase Learning Time, Some Schools Add Days to Academic Year’.
The Buzz of the Community

What do people say about schools?

- Schools are extremely transparent
- Kids love to be at school
- Teachers are already working over and above and beyond the call of duty. They keep being asked to do more
- They went from some not-performing schools to achieving schools
- Teachers are awesome, they really care

What are some barriers to teacher-parent collaboration?

- The school wants volunteers but doesn’t know how to handle them
- There is a communication issue. Different languages, different cultures
- More communication from the teachers to parents would be good. Finding out about child’s grades at a teacher-parent conference is too late
- I wish parents were more active in their kids’ lives, but they are not
- Parents cannot help students in school because they did not finish school themselves

YOUR VOICE
How can we overcome the barriers to successful parent-teacher collaborations?

How can we best utilize our schools as important centers for the community?

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Chapter 6
The Nurturing Neighborhood

YOUR VOICE
How do conditions in our neighborhoods influence the success of our children?

Insights from Community Conversations

• Graffiti and neighborhood blight are seen as a major problem, which dampens community pride and has a demoralizing effect on residents. Trash and objects on the ground can even be dangerous for children and families on walks or going to school.

• Residents are concerned about crime, especially robberies, violent crime, and drug distribution. Students especially are worried about constant shootings and drive-bys. Crime can prevent residents from using important gathering places in the community such as parks.

• Despite its strategic location between the employment hubs of downtown Phoenix and Tempe, the community is struggling to attract and retain successful businesses. While some have seen improvements, most residents feel that lack of employment creates a huge barrier to success for the youth.

Like Flowers in Need of Water

The community is like a garden, and children are like flowers that need to be watered. Adults act as caretakers of the garden. One community member noted, "If you won't give the children the right kind of conditions to thrive, they won't thrive". If we fail to provide the right conditions for the flowers to grow, they certainly will not bloom.
The Buzz of the Community

On blight...
- Eliminate blight, which is killing us
- Grow more apple trees and orange trees in empty spaces
- I would take all of the cat poop and bird poop off of the streets
- Start painting walls and keep the community looking clean and respectable. Maybe people would start acting respectable

On safety...
- Budget cuts have decreased police presence in the area
- I hear gunshots more often than I think I should have to
- Cars do not respect the crossing – the only time they slow down is when they see a police car around
- You cannot go out once it gets dark because there are creepers
- There is a whole bunch of drugs being taken openly in parks, there are dealers across Van Buren

On struggling economy...
- There seems to be a terrible void of businesses
- The workforce indicators show that people are getting more jobs
- The Economy is weighing on everybody: corporate partners, who want to extend themselves, the job that might be available, the teenagers, the parents
- The area has been hit hard during the recent recession, and foreclosures are impacting the community in an even more negative way

YOUR VOICE
How can we turn our neighborhoods into places where children can thrive?
- Chapter 7 -
It Really Does Take a Village

Insights from Community Conversations

- Schools, families, and organizations are already forming partnerships to help the children and youth succeed. Many are aware of the *Balsz Promise Neighborhood* initiative, which has gathered many people and organizations together to create new programs to serve the youth.

- Both residents and representatives of organizations want to see more collaboration. Community members feel that creative partnerships could be created to provide new and enriching activities for the children. They also feel that, by working together, more can be done to make the neighborhoods clean, safe, walkable and aesthetically pleasing.

- Although some partnerships with businesses are already happening that help the children and youth, most would like to see more. Similarly, many would like to see faith communities be invited to partner with other community organizations so that the youth can be better served.

A Partnership that Works

The power of collaboration is already at work in our community. Valley of the Sun United Way is working with the Balsz Elementary School District to pursue a “Promise Neighborhoods” grant. The purpose of the grant is to build pathways for student success. A community partnership has been created, including representatives of key organizations such as Educare, UMOM, Terros, Boys and Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools and many others. Many new programs have already been developed to serve our children.
### The Buzz of the Community

#### Family Partnerships

**What is going on?**
- Coffee talks build linkages between parents and schools
- Arizona First Things First provides tools for families to successfully prepare children for kindergarten.
- First Baptist Church provides food for poor families

**What do people wish for?**
- Organized parent meetings beyond Coffee Talks
- Peer-to-peer youth mentoring
- Skill building, language, and parenting programs for parents
- More Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs
- More activities in the Papago Park
- Build co-ops for parents so that they can be self-sufficient

#### School Partnerships

**What is going on?**
- Schools partner with Jamba Juice, Frito-Lay, Apollo, Hunt Construction, General Dynamics, and others
- Gateway Community College partners with BESD schools and with local businesses - and does Balsz community outreach with students
- Arcadia residents are raising money for Balsz schools
- Junior Achievement builds business skills within students
- Your Experience Counts provides volunteers in schools
- Wake Up program organized with Central City Precinct

**What do people wish for?**
- More afterschool activities for children and families
- More motivational speakers in schools
- More Partnerships with ASU to speak to students and parents about college access and opportunities.

#### Community Partnerships

**What is going on?**
- ASU works with the community through a PBS grant
- Desert Schools Federal Credit Union funds community development efforts
- Phoenix Fire Department provides smoke alarms
- Phoenix Neighborhood Services partners with neighbors on ‘Graffiti Busters’ program
- Neighborhood Associations take care of Balsz neighborhoods

**What do people wish for?**
- More afterschool programs
- Inclusion of businesses in community planning
- More help from City of Phoenix
- Help with clean-ups in Balsz neighborhoods
- Help in dealing with abandoned apartments
- Help with Balsz Pride Day
- Reactivate Good Neighbor program
- Create “Adopt a Park” program with City of Phoenix.

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**YOUR VOICE**

What needs to be done to create other partnerships that can serve our community?
- Chapter 8 -
Enriching the Experiences

Insights from Community Conversations

- There is a lack of opportunities for children and youth to spend their time in an enriching way. The situation is especially serious during the summer. Both children and adults want more sports, hobbies, arts and crafts, and mentoring programs for the children and youth.

- Some activities, sports, and tutoring programs are available in schools and are appreciated by residents. Perry Park offers basketball and football fields, but the park has no staff or programming and does not live up to its potential.

- Community members are excited about the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA facilities that are coming in a few years, but residents feel strongly that opportunities for youth need to be expanded right away. Children want more sports and parents want more family-oriented activities like drama clubs.

‘It’s Snowing in East Phoenix!’

Anything is possible when we create enriching activities for kids. Eleven winters ago, a resident’s friend drove a pick-up truck full of snow from Flagstaff. He dumped the snow on in the resident’s yard, built a snowman and other structures, and invited kids from the area to play. Here is how the resident described the situation: “Everyone is having a good time, and the last thing you were thinking about was crime or anything, because it was just a fun moment.” The neighbors invited Channel 15 to the scene, and it carried a news segment titled: “It’s snowing in East Phoenix!”
The Buzz of the Community

What are our residents saying about activities for children and youth?

Play the crossword puzzle and find out! Read the quotes below and fill in the missing words into the grid, based on the number of letters for each word. Solutions are on page 33.

1. If I were mayor for a day, I would add a better _______ field

2. Schools should provide special places for __________ especially for broken families

3. There is not _______ for kids to do in this area

4. All that stuff we need right now ... we can’t wait for the Boys and Girls Club

5. In schools in P.E., we do a lot of different _______

YOUR VOICE

What kinds of after-school opportunities do we lack and how can we create them?

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__________________________________________________________________________
- Chapter 9 -
Hubs of Engagement

**YOUR VOICE**
Where are the most important gathering places in our community?

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**Insights from Community Conversations**

- Community members want more gathering places, where they can meet with neighbors, relax, learn new things and organize community activities. These places, which serve as the centers of the community, can be thought of as 'Hubs of Engagement'.

- Some areas like this exist already and are appreciated; examples are: Schools, Gateway Community College, Educare, UMOM, Pierce Park. Some hubs, such as the Zoo and the Botanical Gardens, are underutilized by the community. Important hubs yet to be built are Boys and Girls Club and YMCA.

- In some cases, better care needs to be taken of the gathering spaces that do exist. In particular, the parks need help. They are often littered, under-used, and even unsafe.

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**Like the Nearby Airport**

One way to imagine why a hub of engagement is important is to think of an airport through which people come and go as they all travel to various destinations. For example, at the nearby Sky Harbor Airport, people from all walks of life gather, relax, do things, talk to each other, and have meetings. It is a busy place where people connect and interact. In order for all passengers to get safely to their destination, the airport needs to have everything well coordinated.
The Buzz of the Community

The many functions of a Hub:

1. A place of organized activity
   - We need positive projects - not just basketball or baseball games. Something done together

2. A place of gathering
   - We need community gathering places - places to hang. To have impromptu gatherings

3. A home away from home, close to home
   - A lot of parents don’t have cars, so they have to take 3 busses to get to a store

4. A place for communication
   - Kids themselves should have the opportunity to say it for themselves- their hopes, dreams and interests

5. A place of learning
   - Give parents an opportunity to learn – offer parenting classes so they can become better educated and therefore help their kids

6. A place to get help
   - What is not working well is serving the basic needs of our community

7. A place to create community vision
   - I think there are a lot of people who have a vision. Get them together

YOUR VOICE
What can we do to make the best of existing hubs and create new ones?
Insights from Community Conversations

- There needs to be a more frequent flow of accurate information about what is going on in the community. Coffee Talks at BESD schools are considered valuable and indeed a point of pride for those who participate. But many residents want additional and different forms of communication, such as social media, a community website, newsletters or a community magazine.

- The cultural diversity of the community poses challenges in communicating with and understanding each other. There are language barriers between English and non-English speaking community members. There needs to be more effort to engage non-English speakers in community planning.

- People need to be linked physically as well. People are calling for more walkable streets and safe streets, and better transportation options. The Light Rail is appreciated for its connectivity, but limited transportation makes it difficult to get access to it.

**Building Canals of Information**

Fifteen hundred years ago, the Hohokam built a sophisticated canal system right here where we now live. The canals provided fresh water to grow their communities and their crops. Think of information as something like the life-giving waters flowing through a system of canals. Distributed correctly through the right channels, information can flow throughout the community and bring life to the community. People can become connected, discover new things, and share ideas that could breathe life into new visions, projects, and partnerships.
The Buzz of the Community

The need for better flows of information

- Language is a big issue in the district
- Use social media – in a much more productive way
- We need a community magazine
- We need a TV/Radio outlet for the community

The need for better physical connections

- More parking lights are needed
- The Light Rail has been great getting people here but it’s tough for families to really get to places they need to be on the Light Rail
- There is a lack of safe routes to school
- There are lots of rocks around for people to fall and get hurt

YOUR VOICE

What new forms of information channels do we need to build?

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- Chapter 11 – Growing Leaders

**YOUR VOICE**
Who are the leaders in our community and what do they do?

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**Insights from Community Conversations**

- The Balsz community has several compassionate and dedicated leaders who work selflessly for the betterment of the community. In fact, they are mentioned as points of pride in the community. Yet, the challenges are many and they could use the help of an expanding leadership base.

- The community needs more guidance, and the way to do this is to grow more leaders. More people should be invited to take on leadership roles and be more actively engaged in our community. In the process, care must be taken to ensure that leaders truly represent the diverse groups of the community.

- Community members feel that new opportunities should be created for leaders to collaborate, share resources, learn from other communities, and preserve their energies. Some feel that The City of Phoenix’s Good Neighbor program should be reactivated so neighborhood leaders can be given resources and support.

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**Scaffolding for Leadership**

Building an active and strong community is like building a house. There needs to be a plan, and someone to help oversee the construction. Many community members say they are ready and willing to work, but they just don’t have a plan to guide their activities. What can we do? What comes first? How can we fit in? In what ways can we become leaders so we can make sure the community gets built with strength and beauty?
The Buzz of the Community

What are people saying about our ability to grow leadership?

- We have assets: people who care
- We need more leadership
- I think that there are strong leaders in the community who are willing to step up to the plate and spearhead some initiatives that can bring some very positive change to that neighborhood
- Some neighborhood associations have good leaders, but they seem to be working independently on behalf of their own neighborhoods – there needs to be a way to knit these associations together...
- Gather diverse people from the community together into leadership roles – not all whites as it is now
- You need somebody who is friendly and who goes and invites others to do something
- You have a very willing neighborhood. Just need some guidance
- I think the partnerships will come to life with leadership to engage everybody in the proper dialogue to create a strategic vision

YOUR VOICE
How can we best support existing leaders? How can we create new ones as well?
- Chapter 12 -
Involving our Children & Youth

**YOUR VOICE**
How are we engaging children and youth in our community?

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**Insights from Community Conversations**

- Children and youth have many gifts that they can share with others, and they are full of energy. The energy needs to be properly channeled and utilized. Opportunities for youth to take part in community life as responsible citizens must be developed.

- In many ways, children and youth are already helping make our community a better place. Some are active in the Police Department’s Wake Up program and help pick up trash in the neighborhoods. Gateway Community College students are active in the community by helping organize community events.

- At the same time, more opportunities for involving youth need to be created. Youth can be more engaged in the community by volunteering, peer-to-peer mentoring, voting, and joining youth advisory boards and councils. Youth need to be told that they have valuable gifts, and our community needs them.

**Youth in Charge**

Think of the energy and enthusiasm that children and youth can bring to our community as leaders! As part of the Promise Neighborhood initiative, community members have launched a platform to allow children and youth be more directly involved in the planning in our community. Interested youth are able to join a Youth Advisory Council, which will allow them to voice their opinions, volunteer in the community, and acquire leadership training at the same time.
The Buzz of the Community

Involvement of Children and Youth

Every Saturday I participate in the Wake Up program and go pick up trash. The youth have many ideas, and will work hard – there needs to be a structure for involving the youth as leaders now in the community to seek to create change and find solutions.

We need to engage youth in the awesomeness of this community! That’s the most important thing for these kids to learn - that they have gifts they can give to the community.

Youth can be mentors for those around them.

YOUR VOICE
How can we empower and engage children & youth?

Crossword puzzle
(solution from page 25)
Tuning up Our Community

Think of our community as a car – a car that we are driving forward to reach our vision. We can call it, “the community car”. In order to reach our vision, we need to make sure that the all the parts of the car are working together – smoothly and at full speed. If our community were a car, and we wanted it to run well, where do we begin our tuning work? What things would our car need to reach our destination?

Help parents and teachers communicate and collaborate
Provide more encouragement for our children and youth
Build new partnerships and collaborations
Create new and accessible community hubs
Support our current leaders and grow new leaders
Involve and empower our children and youth
Provide language and skill-building support for parents
Create attractive conditions so new businesses will invest in our community
Offer innovative, fun, and enriching activities for our children and youth

YOUR VOICE
In your opinion, what in the Balsz community needs the most tuning?

How can our community know whether we are successful in moving toward our goals?
Next Steps: One Step at a Time

By now, you have seen the story told by your neighbors about how to build a better community. But the story has become even better, because you have now added your own ideas. And others are joining you! So, what is next? What can we do together as a community to build a story of success for our children and youth?

(1) BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS
The message is clear: we need to create opportunities for getting to know each other and what is important to us. We need to connect and communicate before we even think about building a vision. Our diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity. However, as one resident said, "Because of how diverse the population is, there is lots of opportunity to learn about each other and the world as a whole."

As we focus on our children and youth, what should be our community’s priorities?

(2) FORMULATE A VISION
We need to set clear goals which we can strive for and guide our efforts. Some good advice was given by one of our schoolteachers: "We must create a diverse mix of people who can create a unified vision, and make a difference." As we imagine a better future, we must stay focused on our desire to help children and youth succeed.

How can we create an atmosphere of trust and understanding between people, in order to build strong relationships?

(3) TAP OUR RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY
We have many valuable resources, but sometimes we do not take advantage of them. We need to spread the word that everyone is important. We need to rely on what we can do together, because outside resources are scarce.

How do we identify and tap our own resources?

(4) ACT COLLABORATIVELY
In order to achieve our greatest goals, we all need to work together in collaboration without duplicating our efforts. We need to find the right rhythm for engaging people and organizations with different schedules, work styles, and ways of contributing. We all need to work together.

How do we synchronize the many programs and energies within our community?

(5) ENGAGE IN ONGOING LEARNING
We need to find ways to measure the impact of our collaborative efforts. Is this what we should be doing? Can we do better? We need to look at other communities in the Phoenix area and learn from them.

How do we know that our efforts are creating real change? What can we learn from other communities?
How can YOU get involved?

How can you use the unique gifts that you hold to help your community?

THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP OF THEM ALL:
It is about you. Getting involved in your own community. Making a difference. Helping our children and youth succeed. They are counting on you. Perhaps we should all follow the advice of a neighbor who gave input to this booklet. He sighed and then said, "Let's get out of the meeting mentality and get into the action mentality." What can you do to act? What are your unique gifts that you can share with others, share with our youth and children? How can you get involved?

Something to remember before you go:

The story of how to help our children and youth be successful continues to grow!

You are the authors of this story

Let us all work together as a community to write that story of success!

Gratitude is extended to Valley of the Sun United Way, the students, teachers, staff and administrators of the Balsz Elementary School District, and the many community residents and advocates who participated in the community conversations. Without their commitment and support, this scan would not have been possible.