

# ANNIE GLIDDEN NORTH COMMUNITY PROJECT

## Final Report



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## **Executive Summary**

During the spring of 2021 we, sociology graduate students, partnered with the community groups Opportunity DeKalb and The Center of It All. Both groups are focused on revitalizing the Annie Glidden North area. With the help of these two groups, we were able to come up with a plan using qualitative research methods to understand more about the area and the residents. We completed this project by interviewing residents of the area and observing the local park. This paper details what we found during our research and what can be taken away from this research.

One of the major themes that was present throughout this project was community. Many interviewees explained that they do not feel a strong connection to their neighborhood, but they do crave that sense of community. We also found that most of the people have large concerns regarding crime and safety, especially when children are involved. Other concerns regarding children, involve more resources and businesses targeted towards children in the area. Concerns involving adults often focused on lack of transportation and businesses. We not only heard about the negatives of the area, but also the positives and the way people are connected to the area. Most of our interviewees use the resources in the area, but they are only aware of them because of their social networks. When asked about the positives of the area people often mentioned these resources, affordability, and the belief that the area is family oriented.

For future research we recommend studying the different areas within Annie Glidden North, because residents seem to have varying perspectives of the different areas within the area. There was a common belief that crime occurred, but only in certain areas. We also recommend studying a larger, more diverse group of residents because perspectives of safety, crime, and community differed depending on a person's background.

## **Introduction**

Community partners, Opportunity DeKalb and The Center of It All, worked with NIU graduate researchers to conduct a community report. Opportunity DeKalb is a community partner that seeks to improve the Annie Glidden North (AGN) area by providing resources to its residents. The Center of It All is an organization that is working to establish a community center in the AGN area to provide a place for families, teens and children to attend programs and services. The goal of this project was to assess the needs that the AGN residents had, what resources they had, and what resources they lacked. To gather this information, graduate researchers conducted in-depth interviews with residents to find common themes among the interview data. To further understand the neighborhood, researchers conducted ethnographic observation at a local park to document the park itself and the social activities that take place in and around it. In this report there will be the data from the interviews broken down into themes, detailing of park observations, the conclusions the researchers came to, and what should be studied in future reports.

## **Methods**

To collect data for this community report, each of the five researchers met with at least two individuals that resided in the Annie Glidden North area, with one extra interview, totaling to 11 interviews. Interviewees were gathered through connections with the community partners, personal connections, and referrals from interviewees. Researchers asked interviewees questions about their place of living, their family dynamics, their use of community resources, and their neighborhood. The data collected from the interviewees was then coded to detect themes found throughout all the interview data about the experiences the interviewees had residing in the

Annie Glidden North area. Each researcher also conducted six hours of ethnographic observation in Welsh Park located in the Annie Glidden North area, totaling to 30 hours of observation. Researchers noted social dynamics, the setting, the condition of the setting, and the activity surrounding the park.

## **Data and Findings**

### ***Community***

The topic of community came up in every interview that researchers conducted. This was a major theme that emerged from the data and is broken down into various subthemes below.

### **Neighbors**

#### ***Changing of Neighborhood Dynamics***

For many of the long-time residents of the Annie Glidden Area, their neighborhood began to change at some point. This change brought an influx of families and young adults to the community, whereas before their neighborhood predominantly consisted of a few families and a large portion of NIU students. However, when affordable housing became available, the make-up and environment of their neighborhood changed. An NIU alumni originally from Chicago noted this:

But it has changed over the course of years. I do know that when (sighs) Chicago housing projects closed, they gave them the option to move here. And this was where a lot of them like Chicago kids came from. And so, the area just started becoming more of—uh—um more like Chicago. (Interview 2).

This shift to a more Chicago-like environment inferred an influx of criminal behavior and unsafe environment for children. Many believed that some of the neighbors did not show respect for the children around them. As a mother in the AGN Area stated:

What I mean by that is like, you will see more people standing out maybe drinking smoking, which is no problem. But if they didn't have the respect for the kids, like I've seen it when I first moved there. So, I'm just seeing more of that, like you know. It was just getting out of hand and like, again, like back in the city, like I never left (Interview 3).

These new neighbors caused the parents to worry about the interactions their children were having. While some had moved here to get away from the city like environment, they felt as if they had never left.

### *Ideal Neighbors*

Residents of the neighborhood often mentioned ideal neighbors or aspects they like about their neighbors. Most of the residents who felt this way had children. These parents expressed the importance of neighbors. One woman in particular stated her desires for a more inclusive relationship with her neighbors:

I think in my ideal neighborhood, neighbors would talk (laughs) and interact with each other, like I'm from a really small town of like 500 people, which is where I grew up and back then, like everybody knew everybody, you talk to people, you wave to people driving down the street, you ride your bike late at night. And so those are the experiences that I feel sad about not being able to give my kids. So, I think I feel very disconnected in this community (Interview 4).

This feeling of being close to your neighbors not only touched on the aspect of relationships but safety for her children. This mother was not the only resident to feel this way. When talking about concerns, it often came back to the safety of their children. These parents wanted a tighter

knit community; one where their children could be safe outside because they did not have to worry about the actions of their neighbors.

Residents who felt closer to their neighbors also felt safer with their kids playing outside. A woman who noted the lack of respect for children by her neighbors noticed a change when she moved to a different part of the Annie Glidden North area. The move from one residential area to the next meant a world of difference. The environment she had complained about before was not found in her new place of residence. As she states:

I love it. I love it seemed like the parents watch their kids more. This just what I'm noticing for the last two years. People don't stand around drink and smoke, my daughter go outside for walks over here. She's not you know, afraid to go out. I'm like, so, so far, I love it over here (Interview 3).

This environment was what most parents were looking for when it came to their neighbors; a tighter knit community where kids could play outside without having to worry about the actions of their neighbors. Not only did safety seem to improve in these more family-oriented areas, but so did the actions of helping each other out. With the changing of neighbors, the whole environment changed. The closer these residents felt with their neighbors, the less they feared for the safety of themselves and their children.

### *Downside of Neighbors*

While some residents were able to make connections with their neighbors, others felt a disconnect or lack of trust with their neighbors. Residents who noted disconnects with their neighbors stated a variety of reasons why this was the case. One NIU student talked about the limitation of space and constant rotation of neighbors:



Like with the rotation of neighbors, it kinda depends who's living there, if I need to interact with them or not, and if so, like-- Because we don't really have yards or outside a lot it's kind of a happen chance like when you will interact with people like it's kind of like if you happen to be out at the same time, like going to your car (Interview 7).

To this student, the constant changing of residents made it difficult to form connections. The limitation of shared space also contributed to this. Residents who mentioned connections with neighbors often mentioned shared spaces, such as garage sales and backyards. Without these spaces, residents were left with minimal contact, such as waving when passing one another. Other residents mentioned that the people they formed connections with came from outside of their neighborhood.

This lack of connection caused issues for other residents, particularly when it came to their children. A number of residents stated the lack of connection was not so much an issue with children, but rather the adults. This lack of connection with adults however created issues when it came to the safety and general lives of the children. One mother and community leader expressed her concern about this lack of communication with parents:

So, I feel like that's kind of a really big issue because in order you know to get to the kids, you've got to get to the parents, like, how are we gonna. Oh you really can't do much with a minor, you really can't even get a consent from the parent or something so yeah I just think that's a bridge that needs to be gaps or bridge that I think that backwards, I don't know (Interview 11).

Not having a relationship with her neighbors ended up creating barriers for the children to interact. Because she did not know the parents of other children, it was more difficult for her to allow her children to interact outside of the neighborhood. This also meant opportunities for children were not as well known, due to a lack of communication among parents.

Another mother expressed her concern for the safety of her children. Her interactions with some of her neighbors were unfavorable. In one particular instance, she felt unsafe at her residential area's park. The instance, she believed, stemmed from a misinterpretation of her teenage daughter's age. She expressed that she was judged for letting her daughter go off unsupervised with friends since her daughter looks to be age 12 rather than her real age, 17. This led to an uncomfortable experience as she describes:

And then I have some people I've never met before at the park looking at me at the side of they eye (laughs) so I was just like, 'Yeah we gonna leave shortly' ... so I'm not really comfortable around my neighbors... Some of 'em look like, like they might blow up any minute... They just have that look in their eye like (laughs) the crazed look (Interview 9).

This lack of trust makes it difficult for not only her but other residents to be comfortable in shared spaces. Parents feel that they have to worry about their neighbors for a number of reasons. Some residents mentioned smoking, drinking, and other drug use by their neighbors, activities they do not want their children around. While others like the mother above mentioned, basic trust and comfort with being outside of their homes. This lack of communication has made it difficult for their children to build community amongst each other.

### *Race Talk and Neighbors*

Many discussions of neighbors also had to do with race, however, discussions of race were limited in most cases. Many of the residents interviewed talked about race when describing the demographics of the neighborhood. For example, one interviewee expressed in their description of the area: "I haven't looked a census or anything like that, but I know there's minorities, a lot of minorities, in this area" (Interview 10). This notable characteristic of the area acts as a relevant factor in shaping the perceptions residents form of the neighborhood.

One perception of race stood apart from the other interviews, which was a male NIU student. In his account, this individual described his experience as being a cordial outlier in the neighborhood, even referring to himself as "...the token white kid in the apartment. Like I'm in law school, too. So like, I think they've gone out of their way just to be nice to me and I've done the same to be respectful back" (Interview 6). The experience of this interviewee reveals that although many of the residents in the AGN area belong to one race, it does not discourage friendly neighborhood interactions among neighbors of different races. Despite the other concerns expressed by interviewees about the area, race conflict amongst neighbors does not appear to be a concern.

### Trust

Another major subtheme that emerged from the community theme was trust. Residents of the area interviewed often appealed to feelings of trust when explaining their sense of the community and their relationship with the community at large. The use of language surrounding trust revealed that many residents trust others selectively or not at all. Additionally, there is a lack of trust built into the community in a general, more broad sense.

Firstly, interviewees tended to express a lack of trust rooted in a lack of relationship amongst neighbors. It was common for interviewees to express that people tend to keep to themselves in the neighborhood. The lack of trust that residents feel for their neighbors is ultimately due to a disconnect between themselves and others. For example, one resident said "I don't feel super connected with my neighbors here... Everybody's kind of to themselves" (Interview 4). This is the basis of why the sense of community is lacking for her, as well as for others. She later went on to say of her children: "they want to have playdates, but you don't

really know-- you haven't met the parents, and you're not really sure what's going on in the house" (Interview 4). Since she feels disconnected from her neighbors, she does not know them and therefore does not trust that their homes are safe for her children to be in. So, because people keep to themselves, the opportunity to build trust, and in turn build a sense of community together is limited. The idea here that interviewees expressed is that they cannot trust someone that they do not know on a personal level.

Additionally, many interviewees expressed that there is only some very local sense of trust, such as the immediate street they live on or the specific apartment complex, but a lack of trust outside of the close vicinity. While people tend to keep to themselves, there is often a familiarity at least between immediate neighbors. Many interviewees mentioned at least one other person who lives in the neighborhood that they interact with and feel safe around. For instance, one resident of the neighborhood mentioned that her and her neighbors look out for each other: "If I see one of their packages and it looks expensive or something that someone might steal, I would take it in and just text them and let them know that I had it and vice versa" (interview 7). This type of relationship, where there is immediate trust between people, emphasizes the lack of trust that residents have for the general community. Given that the neighbors suspect their packages may be stolen, this indicates trust among each other that involves a distrust for others in the neighborhood. This is representative of a common idea expressed in the interviews: that interviewees' own immediate area is safe, and that it is other areas and people from other areas that are not to be trusted.

One thing we looked to examine is the social interactions shared amongst the residents of the neighborhood. By doing so, we were able to develop a sense of the social strengths and

weaknesses of the area. After conducting the interviews, it was commonly reported most the interaction seen in the neighborhood is shared amongst the children, while the adults mostly engage with one another on a limited basis.

The interaction shared amongst the children is mostly seen observed as positive encounters amongst one another. The children of this area often engage in play, outdoor activities, extracurricular programs, and much more. Their attitudes toward one another are mostly conducive to maintaining a sense of shared unity amongst each other. Outside of small quarrels, there are not a lot of negative experiences observed amongst the children. For example, the respondent of interview eleven recalls her experience as a summer camp counselor for the children of the University Village Apartment Complex. In her time there, she provided insight of the camp having a great impact on the children. She stated:

They would also get meals at the Summer Camp, so I think that's really beneficial because a lot of times kids don't always get the.... aren't, aren't able to get the three meals... three meals a day. And it will not only help with that, but also engage with other people, too. You would see friendships. For me, yeah. So it was a good program, I mean, was difficult because there's a lot of kids but (Interview 11).

Through these interactions, it can be inferred that the children have created a great sense of support for one another. Despite any circumstances they may face in their day to day lives, they are able to rely on each other in times of need. This trait is also visible amongst some of their parental figures.

Regarding the adult population of the area, shared interactions seemed to be limited. They seem to show a slightly contrasting activity from the children, mainly staying to themselves or within their intimate networks of family, friends, and others they deem as having significance. They are mostly cordial with their neighbors, but reasoning behind this seemed to vary. Most

respondents reported their reasoning as being the concerns for safety and crime within the area. Because of this, the adult population do not engage with one another outside of being cordial with neighbors or contributing to the informal neighborhood consensus of looking after the children as they play outside. Despite these circumstances, there were reports of residents who desired different circumstances. For example, the respondent of interview four detailed that she wished to be more acquainted with her neighbors. She stated:

I think in my ideal neighborhood, neighbors would talk (laughs) and interact with each other, like I'm from a really small town of like 500 people, which is where I grew up and back then, like everybody knew everybody, you talk to people, you wave to people driving down the street, you ride your bike late at night. And so those are the experiences that I feel sad about not being able to give my kids. So I think I feel very disconnected in this community (Interview 4).

From this, it's observable that there is a desire for community is present, but the circumstance of the neighborhood is keeping them from doing so. With this, it can be implied that there is a desire for change and improvement for the community.

### Engagement

Another subtheme that emerged from community is engagement. When asked about how they were engaged in the community, interviewees typically gave one of three different answers. Some are involved through their workplace, through a social organization, or through their own personal social connections. Although many of the interviewees were engaged in their community, many expressed a feeling of disconnect and that they often stuck to themselves.

For a few interviewees, they were engaged with their community through their workplace, but not through a personal connection they had. One interviewee stated "...here is the thing, it's not that I'm close to my neighbors, I'm close with the community because of what my

job is” (Interview 2). Another interviewee also mentioned that she is connected through a program: “I work for the Lift Program, familiar with nutrition programs for low-income families” (Interview 1).

Some interviewees recalled the times that they volunteered with programs involved with the Annie Glidden North area. One interviewee said that she “volunteered for a summer camp with children who live in the apartment complex,” and through her church by “feeding homeless [people], dinners being homeless, or just anybody who needs a free hot meal. And then we do our own fundraising, again, to donate to local charities...” (Interview 1).

Finally, when it came to personal social connections for engagement in the community, many interviewees expressed a disconnect with their neighbors. One interviewee expressed:

I don't feel super connected with my neighbors here. The people I talk to are the people that I've met outside of living here, and we've just kind of made connections that, ‘oh my gosh, I live in that area too.’ So I wouldn't say that I've made new friends just from living in this area. Everybody's kind of to themselves (Interview 4).

Other interviewees expressed that if there were programs for themselves to be involved in, they may feel connected to their community, and that it may help promote people to live in the neighborhood longer. One interviewee said, “I don't know if there's any Senior Services. I'd like to get around with other seniors. I know there's senior care, but it doesn't help” (Interview 5).

Another interviewee said “practices that would promote like continued residence, you know. Because people that would want to live here for more than two, three years will genuinely be invested in like, the betterment of the community” (Interview 6).

### ***Crime and Safety***

The second major theme that emerged was crime and safety. Overall, interviewees expressed an overarching concern for the level of crime in the neighborhood. All interviewees had at least some concern for the criminal activity and the safety of neighborhood residents. Almost all interviewees, however, expressed that they fear for the safety of others, mainly children, more than they fear for their own safety. Additionally, most interviewees expressed that they feel the criminal activity is specific to parts of town that they do not live in. The general consensus amongst interviewees is that crime has increased relatively recently, and that this is more of an issue for children and the reputation of the neighborhood than the risk of personal victimization.

### *Children's Safety*

The most common safety concern that every interviewee mentioned is the concern for children's safety in the neighborhood. When asked about safety, even when unprompted about the safety of others, every interviewee mentioned a concern for the neighborhood children. The main issue that emerged was the lack of supervision that residents feel puts kids at risk. There were other aspects to this as well, such as lack of safe spaces for children in the neighborhood, and lack of activities and resources for children to keep them busy and out of trouble.

The lack of supervision being a concern was apparent throughout the interviews. Even interviewees without children of their own expressed a concern for the unsupervised kids they see in the neighborhood. This fear is rooted both in a fear that children will be harmed by others, and also that children may cause harm to themselves due to a lack of supervision. Some interviewees mentioned that crime is a reason they will not let their children play outside, while others mentioned a fear that some kids may get hit by a car. Many interviewees described the



streets as being full of children, and this is also related to the fact that there is a lack of safe spaces and resources for children.

Since there is an apparent lack of safe spaces and resources for activity in the neighborhood, children end up playing in the streets. One mother who was interviewed said “there’s shootings down the street from us... There are prostitutes down there, you know? Drugs, so no. My kids won’t be around that” (Interview 9). This points to a need for a safe area for children to play.

In addition to the lack of outdoor spaces to play in the neighborhood, there is a lack of resources as well, such as a community center, to keep them busy. Many interviewees mentioned a need for other resources that could keep children out of trouble, out of the street, and in a safe, supervised space. For example, one resident said: “that's what we're focused on is the kids. What are we doing for them? How can we get them not outside at 10, 11 o'clock at night arguing, fighting with whoever, whenever. They need activities” (Interview 2). So, providing children with activities is seen as a way to keep kids safe, and those resources for activities are lacking.

### *Stigma and Reputation*

Another major concern regarding crime in the neighborhood is the stigma associated with being a high-crime area. Many interviewees expressed this as more of an issue than their own sense of safety. In general, interviewees expressed concern for the negative stereotypes associated with the neighborhood as well as the poor image that others have about the Annie Glidden North area.

Some interviewees discussed this in terms of how the stigma affects those who live there, while some discussed stigma in terms of how it affects the town as a whole. The way that stigma

affects residents is on a personal level, where people from outside of the neighborhood treat those in the neighborhood differently. Additionally, some residents see the label of coming from a low-income and high-crime area as damaging to their identity.

On the other hand, the concern for the reputation of the neighborhood comes down to the image of the neighborhood and how that has a broader impact. For example, one interviewee expressed that her concern is “trying to clean up the image a little bit” and that she sees there is a risk that people “won’t want to move out here” (Interview 1) due to the reputation of being high crime. Both of these concerns are rooted in the criminal activity in the area.

### *Distance from Crime*

Another way that crime was discussed was through the interviewee’s distance from criminal activity. Often, interviewees viewed crime as taking place in specific parts of town that they do not live in and that they avoid. This was revealed through language revolving around limited risk of personal victimization or feeling only slightly unsafe in the neighborhood as a whole.

When interviewees discussed their own fears or safety concerns for themselves, the message was generally that it is other parts of town where they feel unsafe, not their particular street or subdivision. For instance, one interviewee said of where she lives: “it’s like a little suburb. It really is, so where I stay it’s not as bad—it’s not bad—to me it’s not bad” (Interview 9). However, she later went on to say: “The things that are close which is on Hillcrest where 7/11 and Casey’s are, that’s where the prostitutes are. And the people who hang out by the smoke shop, and all that stuff, so you don’t really wanna go over there. Cause that’s the bad area” (Interview 9). This reference to a “bad area” to avoid holds weight for many interviewees.

While many refer to spaces outside of their immediate vicinity as high-crime spaces to avoid, it is also common to feel the need to be vigilant and aware in the neighborhood, indicating that the crime feels both near and far at the same time. For example, one interviewee mentioned that he feels “pretty on edge sometimes” (Interview 6). While another expressed that “there’s like, a certain time... maybe in the night, I don’t go out without having someone with me” (Interview 10). So, while most feel safe in their own area of the neighborhood, the knowledge that crime is taking place somewhat near the interviewees causes some tension.

### *Who is at Fault*

While discussions of criminality were brought up frequently in the interviews, an intriguing point brought up was one of who was committing the crime. From the perception of the residents, most of the crime occurring was not from those who live neighborhood, but from those who do not. Interviewees thought the individuals committing crimes had connection to residents who live in the area, ranging anywhere from associates to rivals from their previous residence. For example, one resident of the neighborhood recalls her experience with the crime of the Annie Glidden North area, stating “The riff-raff is here like a bunch of people from Aurora come up here now, and they start fights like gang fights and shootings with people here” (Interview 9). Being that the residents, do not see themselves as a direct source of the crime within the neighborhood, then it can be implied that the traffic and mobility of the area should be examined in conversations of explaining crime in the area. An aspect to consider is the fact that this area is populated with NIU students as well. The presence of a college campus attracts frequent visitors to the area, increasing the number of non-residents at times.

### *Parental Concerns*

Much of the discussion of crime and safety centered around parents and their children. Many of the interviewees were parents and they expressed a variety of concerns for their children in the neighborhood. Their concerns ranged from activities for their kids, social concerns, and safety concerns.

Parents expressed that they did not think that there were enough programs or places for the children to engage in activities. One interviewee said, “There's no like, well they got parks. But it's not like, no activities for the kids to be involved. That's what's missing” and that she would like to see, “mentorship for kids, um teen-parent programs” (Interview 2). They expressed concern that the lack of programs and places for children would lead them to have nothing to do, and that they would be, “just wandering around” (Interview 2).

When it comes to social concerns, parents are worried that there are not enough areas that are safe for children. One interviewee said “But it's a basketball court. But then you have older people out there drink, smoking and now it isn't safe for our kids to be out there now” (Interview 2). Another interviewee suggested the city put something in the area for kids, while expressing doubt that such a place would come into the area. They said, “I know they won't do it, but like something fun for the kids, besides parks...” (Interview 8).

Finally, parents have safety concerns for their children. Many of them are concerned about the level of crime in the area and sometimes they are hesitant about letting their children outside. An interviewee said, “I have safety concerns. For my kids in this area. Definitely. The increase of crime and violence, incidences with guns. I'm super overprotective of even letting my kids just run around outside...” (Interview 4). Although she still lives in the Annie Glidden North area, one interviewee moved to another apartment because she was concerned for the

safety of her children: “I wanted the safety for my daughter. So, so it made me leave there...”  
(Interview 3).

### ***Renter Concerns***

Many concerns raised were centered around the situation of renters and their experiences living under leasing conditions. This discussion also involved the problems revolving around the landlords, and mobility/temporariness of those in the neighborhood.

### **Landlords**

A common concern amongst renters in the Annie Glidden North was that of landlords and upkeep of the properties. When asked about their residence, renters complained about a lack of respect for space and landlords' diligence in fixing issues. Some complained about problems going on for years, such as clogging of drains and broken outlets. Seemingly easy problems to be fixed, were then ignored by landlords. Other issues, such as plowing, caused inconveniences for residents. One law student complained about this problem:

Like my boyfriend lives down the street and we used to just like walk back and forth, but now that there's not sidewalks plowed or anything it's a lot harder because there's a lot of snow and then just in general, like the maintenance and the upkeep of the buildings, like a lot of the landlords aren't as concerned, I guess, with that (Interview 7).

Maintenance of rental properties was also an issue for an elderly woman and her husband. In her complaints, access to sidewalks was difficult for those with disabilities, such as her husband who had to use a walker. Since the sidewalks had not been maintained, he could not use them to take walks with his wife. Other times, these paths were shut down, making it inconvenient for residents to use.

Another issue involving landlords was that of towing. Residents complained about how quickly vehicles were towed in their area. It was implied that landlords often used towing as a way to make money off of their renters – a tactic that happened so frequently, some were afraid of parking their cars. One resident compared these landlords to slumlords:

So I think it's like a-- there is like a contributing factor from both sides where it's like, this part of like, these establishments that are trying to run DeKalb from like the, you know, kind of like classic like slumlord managers of running these rental units, to the towing people, to the actual residents themselves that I think kind of contribute and should be addressed, but I don't really know how (Interview 6).

Towing is not only an inconvenience for residents, but an extra expense. One resident implied that towing by landlords was done as punishment for those who did not pay rent on time. When combining the inconvenience of towing and maintenance, relationships with landlords seemed to decrease. While not all residents felt a mistrust with their landlords, many expressed that there is a problem regarding landlords in the Annie Glidden North area.

### Mobility

Mobility was also often discussed during our interviews. On this subject, respondents shared how they have lived in more than one home within the Annie Glidden area. The direct influence of this decision for residents was desire to find more suitable living conditions according to their living standards, whether it be price of rent, amount of space in their home, neighborhood demographics, traffic, or many other reasons. When expressing her reasoning for moving to multiple places within the area, respondent of interview three says:

What really made me leave is again, when I got my job and started making more money and they started charging me market rent. As my daughter was getting older, like, I'm like, we need bigger space. I'm like, you know, and I asked them, like, can I get a bigger apartment? You know, I don't mind paying. You know,

because again, I still loved it, even though I saw the change. You know, I wasn't out there. It's just you know, I wanted the safety for my daughter. So, so it made me leave there. I had a friend that was staying in suburban. Again, it was the summertime we visit. I'm like it's so quiet over here, nobody's out here. And I'm like, I'm filling out for an application to come over here, and you know, I'm paying market rent anyways, the same more quiet over here. Well, let me try going over there. And again, once I got in, there was the same thing. I'm like, oh, wow, like okay, it was the same thing as the village like a lot of people standing around, drinking and smoking, like no respect for the kids, again. And I'm like, you know, they're gonna do it everywhere, but it was like a there wasn't mature enough. Like, they weren't mature enough (Interview 3).

Within this response, this interviewee's encounter displays a trend seen within this community, a constant pursuit for comfortable and reasonable living standards. The current concerns existing within the Annie Glidden North area prevents the ideal lifestyle that some of the residents are in search for.

Another topic relating to mobility that was commonly discussed amongst the respondents was their reasoning for moving to DeKalb, to escape the inner-city communities of the Chicagoland area. Many expressed their reasoning behind leaving Chicago to DeKalb was for a variety of reasons, including more accessibility to social resources, pursuing their education, escaping inner-city violence, and many other reasons. One interviewee describes the shift in her experience in living in DeKalb. What once was a community that provided haven for her and her child soon became a reminder of her previous life. She states:

I will say from the village, when I first moved there, oh my god, I loved it. My mom loved it. She visited me every weekend, it was quiet. The grass the green, like, there wasn't that many people, you know, and I started noticing, like, as the years you know, bypass is like, more younger people, you know, more people that wasn't, I guess, ready-- wasn't so mature, I guess. You know what I mean? It was just like, you know, I wasn't going outside of there, either. But it was just like, you know, my kids, my daughter was starting to go outside, when I first moved there. So, I'm just seeing more of that, like you know. It was it was just getting out of hand and like, again, like back in the city, like I never left, so... (Interview 3).

Using her experience, this account shows that the residents of this neighborhood have a desire for a sense of community, which is something that they didn't receive in the Chicagoland area. They want to be able to live safely, have great relations with neighbors, and seek higher prestige. The fact that these troubles have followed them into their new lives may imply that there is something to further investigate.

## ***Resources***

### *Use of Resources*

When discussing community many of the interviewees also brought up the resources in the neighborhood that they utilize, how they gained access to these resources, and how they learned that these resources were available. Despite the varying number of years lived in the area, almost all of the interviewees indicated that they made use of at least some resources. The use of resources varied amongst the residents, however, many of the interviewees highlighted resources that were not mentioned by others. For example, one resident said, "Yes, yes. I use the food pantry on the church on Annie Glidden right next to 7/11" (Interview 3). Other resources that were used by the people we interviewed included the health department, the Northern Illinois Food Bank, the Huskie bus line, and RAMP, to name a few.

It is important to take note that the vast majority of the people who were interviewed did utilize the resources in the area or have used them in the past. The need for these different resources was shown by one resident:

You know [DeKalb] blossomed over the years, has a lot of programs and services for families. Programs that were never around, you know, 10, 20 years ago, because there wasn't, at that time, there wasn't a need. Now we have seen that



there's a need for programs. So thankfully. You know, like, Dan Kenney, and all those other people who've been instrumental in you know, finding ways to organize, you know, programs and nonprofits are amazing (Interview 1).

It is important to see the need for resources in the neighborhood, especially since the stereotype of the area is that it is low-income. Out of the eleven people, we interviewed only one of the interviewees is a homeowner. Although owning a home does not necessarily equate to financial independence, we must recognize that it is often more difficult to buy a house without financial stability. Other interviewees also talked about people being drawn to this neighborhood because it is cheaper than surrounding areas. In one interview, a renter talked about how people moving to the area may be attracted to the Annie Glidden North neighborhood for the same reasons she and her family were. She explains this by saying, “Like you could get a decent size living, housing, for the amount you can get. Compared to everywhere else where it’s so hard, you know?” (Interview 8). This shows the importance of price and available resources to the people who live in the Annie Glidden North neighborhood.

Many interviewees also discussed how they became aware of the available resources in the AGN area. Some interviewees explain that they receive their information from emails and other internet sources. One interviewee stated, “Yeah, so I keep up with like, you know, the newsletters, or even like at work, I’m pretty they keep us up to date with like you know the current resources current” (Interview 11). Another interviewee explained that she is subscribed to multiple emailing lists to keep up with the resources in the neighborhood.

Although all of the interviewees were aware of the resources allotted to them, many of the people we interviewed were not aware of a way to make these resources more widely known to other residents in the neighborhood. Four of our interviewees work in social services, so that

gives them an advantage to knowing of the resources in the area. It was important to the people that we interviewed that more people become aware of the resources in the area, but their only ways to remedy this situation involve spreading the message using fliers or through social media. It may be important to see how these resources can become more widely known to residents who don't have the social ties many of our interviewees were lucky enough to have.

### Transportation

#### *Access to Services*

A concern brought up by multiple residents was transportation. While the Annie Glidden North community had a large source of social services to rely on, getting access to these services is not always easy for many residents. A good portion of those in need of these services do not own vehicles. This meant they relied on public transport to get to these locations. While the NIU bus system catered to these locations, the cost and the time added up for these residents. Not only were residents using the busses to get to the services, but also for general errands and work. On top of all of this, the bus stops are often spread out across DeKalb. As one resident stated:

But, um, you know, transportation. There's, uh, people have a lot of barriers, in general. Transportation, more access to computers even, even to apply for benefits. There's like, various places to go apply for benefits, even having like one central local support where you can call and ask and get more support on applying for benefits or things like that. After school programs for kids, I think, the Y may have something too, but then there's a transportation aspect, as well (Interview 10).

These services, meant to help people, were creating barriers to access. Each time the residents would use the bus there was a fee, fees that add up quickly. One interviewee stated that a more centralized location of the services would greatly reduce this burden, while another mentioned

how the COVID-19 pandemic brought awareness to transportation barriers. One health care worker talked about the ease of access with phones:

Yeah, I mean, especially right now because we're doing everything over the phone. So, that helps families, you know, get a lot of their clients don't have transportation. So, they were using the bus, or they would walk into the last year. And a lot of payments have been on over the telephone, which has been a huge convenience with family (Interview 1).

While shifting services over the phone was difficult at times, it created conveniences for many. Clients or users of the services did not have to worry about transportation to receive help. The inconvenience of transportation is often overlooked in the Annie Glidden North community, as demonstrated by the residents that were interviewed.

#### *Effect on Community Involvement*

Transportation was not only a concern for getting access to services but also community events. Residents expressed frustrations with community events and the difficulties of getting transportation. Events meant to be free and build up the community were difficult for some residents to attend because of transportation. Families that did not have cars would have to rely on busses that require fares. As one resident stated:

Yeah, because that would be the main thing, especially on that side of town is, well, you guys want us to be involved? Or you want us to do this, but how are we going to get there? We don't have the transportation for this (Interview 2).

The idea of having an event in a central location seemed convenient but instead left out large portions of the community. As multiple residents stated, problems in the community often come back to transportation. Even teenagers in the community are having issues when it comes to the busses. Two residents expressed concerns about teens and their ability to use the NIU bus system. One mother talked about her teenage daughter's confusion with the bus system and how

it was the only available option when she was at work. Another resident expressed concern with teenagers getting access to programs directed at them:

But there's no transportation for them. Because the bus services is either for students or the bus services is by the red line and green line, but the kids don't know how to get on there to do it. (Interview 2).

Teenagers who rely mostly on their parents will find difficulties navigating the bus system, combined with the cost of the bus fare begins adding up, the bus ends up becoming an inconvenience. Even with access to free events and programs, the expense and fees of transportation create barriers.

### *Businesses and Policing*

Another concern multiple residents of the Annie Glidden North area brought up was the lack of businesses in the area. A general complaint was that grocery stores were not close to the AGN area, but instead the area has convenience stores and liquor stores. These stores have the bare necessities but not fresh produce or other essential items. In order to get groceries, residents without cars would have to take the bus, which adds additional time and money to errands. Even though residents are able to get milk and eggs from these closer convenience stores, some were reluctant to do so. The few stores that were within walking distance are often surrounded by young adults loitering around, drinking and smoking outside the buildings. Because some of the locations had been robbed in the past, it makes residents wary when visiting these stores.

This delinquent behavior often brings police to the area. Even though there was an increased presence of cops around, these behaviors did not stop. One resident commented on how people will just wait until the police officers' backs are turned. Some residents expressed desires for

increased surveillance with one resident complained about speeding and the danger it brought to children who would play outside. Another resident complained about mattresses being burned multiple times and no police intervention. Instances of crime without any police intervention were common and caused frustration for several of the residents that were interviewed.

### ***Park Observations***

Not only did we interview people who lived in the Annie Glidden North to see how people felt about the area, but we also observed a common area that many interviewees mentioned. We did a total of 30 hours of observation at Welsh Park during the last week of March and the first few weeks of April. In our observations, we took note of the use, interactions, and maintenance of the park. Within this section, we will be discussing community, crime and safety, and maintenance.

### ***Community***

One of the main things we saw while observing at Welsh Park was the people. Most of the people who went to the park were either only passing through or only interacted with the people they showed up with. This may be an influence of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, but it also may show the lack of community that many of the interviewees discussed during their interviews. From these interactions, we can see that most people who go to the park keep to themselves or stay within their social circle. From our interviews, we can see that the residents crave a sense of community, but it is hard to develop that sense of community.

Many of the people who went to the park would walk along the path in front of the park and use the bike path before leaving the area. A large portion of them would only pass by the park, making use of the park's paths to walk their dogs and jog. These people would often keep

their headphones in their ears while in the area, which might indicate that people in the area keep to themselves and do not want to be disturbed by others when using the park. The majority of people who seemed to utilize the bike path and sidewalks were not families who lived in the area, rather young adults. A lot of the walkers and joggers were young, college-aged women who turned towards the NIU campus after leaving Welsh Park.

It can be assumed that because the park is so close to the university's campus that students who are not residents of the park might utilize the park. The walkers and joggers we observed also seemed to keep to themselves and go through the area quickly. This could relate to the stereotypes about the neighborhood and people's perceptions of the area. Although people were still utilizing what the park has to offer, we have to question whether this was due to location, lack of other places to walk, or if people have different perceptions of the area.

### *Crime and Safety*

It seemed from our observations that the park was often misused. Some of our interviewees claimed that teenagers and other young people often use the park to drink alcohol and do drugs. At our observations, we saw a lot of litter that confirms these claims. We found bottles and cans of alcohol littering the grass surrounding the park, along with cigarette butts. One of our researchers also saw a woman smoking from a hookah while she was in the seating area in the park. This shows that more teenagers and young adults may be utilizing the park area than children because they have nowhere else to be. It may be important to give young people access to a place where they can hang out with friends where they are not given the opportunity to get into trouble.

The young children that were there, were often dropped off at the park by their parents or met up with their friends without parental supervision. The majority of these kids looked to be about eleven or twelve years old. Many of them also brought younger siblings with them to the park. Despite these children being left to their own devices, we did not witness these children engaging in delinquent behavior. These children seemed to feel comfortable going to the park and spending time there without parental supervision. This also shows that some parents feel safe enough to send their children to the park without them being there to supervise. We found that some of the unsupervised children at the park seemed to follow their parents' rules. For example, one child asked an adult who was at the park with another group to go into the street to get a ball, because the child was not allowed to go into the street by himself. Despite the stereotypes regarding crime and safety, parents and children seem to feel safe being in the area during the day.

Though parents and children seemed to feel safe at the park, we found that the area surrounding the park was not always safe for the children. We came to this conclusion by observing the surrounding area. The park lays off of a residential road that many cars use throughout the day. Even though there is a sign indicating the speed limit at 25 miles per hour this was not the average speed. We saw that many of the drivers passing through often drove much faster than this. This is worrying for the children and residents who use the park and live in the area. There is also not a parking lot designated for guests, so people have to park alongside the road. The busy road makes it an inconvenient location to park with kids. Reckless driving on this road could be dangerous for the residents and the people who go to Welsh Park.

### *Maintenance of the Park*

Besides the litter in the grass near the park, the rest of the park was in excellent condition. The playground equipment looked to be freshly painted, with its lack of chips and vibrant primary colors. The grass surrounding the park also looked to be cut often, and the only flaw with it was the discoloration from the winter weather. There also did not seem to be any holes or tears in the volleyball net and the tennis court nets. We could, however, see remnants of washed-off graffiti in the covered seating area next to the playground. This shows that the park is well maintained and people do care about the park.

Even though the equipment at the park looked to be in good condition, there were often not a lot of people utilizing it. As we had mentioned earlier, many of the people who visited the park only passed through when using the bike path and sidewalk. During many hours of our observation, there were either no visitors at the park or one small group that would be there for a short period. Although our observations of the park took place in early spring, when the weather ranged from 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. This caused us to wonder why more people are not utilizing this well-maintained park more when the weather allows them.

### ***Positives of the Neighborhood***

Despite there being negative stereotypes about Annie Glidden North area, many of the interviewees also told us about the positive aspects of living in the area. While all of our interviewees had something to say about the negative aspects, there were also multiple positives. When asked about their area of resident the interviewees would explain why they moved to the neighborhood, the aspects of the neighborhood they viewed as positive, and how the area differed from other places they have lived previously.



One of the main things that Annie Glidden North is known for is the inexpensive housing for people of all ages, and this was represented in our interviews. When asked about what drew her to the area one resident stated, “It was cheaper over here and I could get a bigger place that was more affordable in this area” (Interview 4). This was a common positive amongst many of the interviewees. Another resident stated that, “One of the apartments I did tour, they just offered me one of their two bedrooms, at a single bedroom rate like \$600, so it's super cheap” (Interview 6). Even though these two interviewees had differing backgrounds—a mother and a young male law student at NIU—both found affordability a positive of the area. Despite their different demographics, we can see that both individuals valued affordability in housing. This is what drew both of these interviewees, along with others, to the area rather than to other places in DeKalb or to surrounding towns.

Other aspects that drew our interviewees towards the area were the location in relation to businesses and NIU. One interviewee said, “I guess I really liked how close it was to the university and it was close to like some fast-food places and gas station. But I would say mainly I really liked my townhouse and like my house specifically that had like parking” (Interview 7). This along with other similar statements indicated that many of the people who live in this area were connected to Northern Illinois University. Whether they are the ones attending the university or not, multiple interviewees inferred their connection. Although there seems to be a large student population in the area, we also have to think about the resources and businesses in the area that are available because it's so close to the university. It is important to note how this affects the resources given to residents who are not college students. This can be observed in the amount of talk by residents, who are not students, about the Huskie bus line. When speaking

about the positives of the area residents would talk about the convenience of having a bus that goes throughout DeKalb.

Although the price was seen as one of the major draws to the neighborhood, for many people this was not the only positive aspect discussed in the interviews. One common aspect found in many of the interviews that were considered a positive was the makeup of the neighborhood. Six of our interviewees have children who live with them, so the dynamic of the neighborhood was very important to them. One parent expressed this importance and showed how the dynamic met their expectations of being family orientated. One interviewee gave an example of how the neighborhood is family-oriented by stating:

It's really not—when it's hot outside or warm or not—I mean you see kids are outside playing in the snow. We have like these huge backyards, so they're out there playing, so I mean it's—over here where we live it's like a little suburb (Interview 9).

This is not the only person who was interviewed that describes the Annie Glidden North area in this way. Many of the interviewees described children playing outside, feeling comfortable around their neighbors despite not knowing them personally, and enjoying the set-up of their neighborhoods. This was exemplified by one resident:

I love it, because it's like a community to help others, you know what I mean? Like they do a garage sale or whatever. And, you know, people may set out an old table or something they don't need. And you know, this over here is like a community help. You know, other families, you know what I mean? And it's like, you don't have to, you know, be so defensive when you walking to and from your car, or whatever (Interview 3).

Having a sense of community, where residents felt safe to go about their daily lives was a major positive to residents. Especially to those who moved from different areas and even neighborhoods located in Annie Glidden Area.

Many of the people interviewed were not originally from the DeKalb area, so they were able to compare the Annie Glidden North neighborhood to other places they had lived. A couple of the interviewees were originally from Chicago, which allowed her to compare the two cities.

With a focus on the Annie Glidden North one interviewee stated that:

Especially with kids, you know, you definitely have a lot going on with kids. There's a lot to do out here. I feel it, children, there's a lot of programs to get them into, a lot of things that the park district offer... I mean, like I said, it's like the city, but it's (emphasized) not bad. Like it's not as much violence... You still got a lot of friendly people, you know, in the area, so just to have resources near you is good (Interview 8).

Although safety is still a large concern for the people, we interviewed showed us the importance of looking at individual neighborhoods. Depending on where residents lived, determined if their views were positive. Those who mentioned negatives would refer to crime. This is very important to look at because high crime is the largest stereotype about Annie Glidden North. A couple interviewee emphasized the differences in neighborhoods when they move around the area and how certain neighborhoods had more positive aspects. The lower the crime and the more interactions they would have with neighbors, the more positives interviewee had to say about the area.

### **Conclusions**

Ultimately, we found that residents of the neighborhood that were interviewed have similar concerns as well as consistent reports of resources used and resources lacking. The main issue that residents centered their discussion around was community. This involved both their sense of what their community is like as well as their relationship with the community. We found that discussions of the community revolved around ideas of trust, neighbors, engagement, and social interactions. Trust was central to a sense of safety, where residents felt distrust towards

outsiders, but trust or at least cordial relations with their immediate neighbors. Many residents had limited engagement with the community but were longing for feeling a connection with the community. In general, social interaction is limited and people tend to keep to themselves. However, the consensus is that the introduction of more resources is a way to improve these issues, increase engagement, and foster a welcoming and safe sense of community.

Concerns for safety and the level of crime in the area were also found to be of importance for everyone interviewed. Most of these concerns for safety were centered around children's safety, which many residents viewed as amenable through the introduction of certain resources. Most interviewees, both parents and those without children, expressed a desire for more options for activities for children as well as more safe spaces for children to play and spend their time. Other children's resources that interviewees mentioned were affordable daycare and programs targeted towards older children.

Other prominently discussed topics were transportation and positives of the neighborhood. Most of the discussion surrounding transportation was difficulty with access to transportation. Although there is an abundance of options for transportation, the lack of convenience and price of transportation leads to difficulties for many residents. Additionally, the issue of unreasonable towing came up on multiple occasions as a concern. Finally, most of the discourse on positives in the neighborhood revolved around the affordability of the area as well as the family-oriented nature of the neighborhood.

Our recommendations for future research are rooted in advancing a more robust and deeper wealth of knowledge on the AGN area. First, further research should be done to determine differences between subdivisions or micro-neighborhoods within the neighborhood.

Most residents tended to view their community on a more localized level and were most concerned with the immediate area surrounding where they live. This indicates that needs and grievances vary across the neighborhood itself. Additionally, further research should be done to reach more parts of the community that our sample did not reach. Our sample was almost exclusively female, and most of our sample had connections to the university. This indicates that our study did not include a wide variety of voices in the community, so targeted research towards other groups in the community is needed for deeper understanding of the issues discussed in this report.