EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of the Beloved Community Village (BCV) evaluation demonstrate that over the course of the first nine months, BCV has been a success. In July 2017, when the evaluation was initiated by the Burnes Center on Poverty and Homelessness, there was no certainty that BCV would still be operational come May 2018. Yet, by all accounts, BCV is operational and widely considered a fully-functioning and productive community. Importantly, understanding BCV’s success is complex given the developmental process of an alternative solution to homelessness using an intentional community model, which does not arrive at a fixed destination but rather continues to evolve, change, and grow. However, all reported findings indicate that BCV is a demonstrably positive effort operated and supported by an intentional community of individuals largely working for the betterment of those involved, chiefly those living in the Village.

The evaluation assessed results at the individual, neighborhood, and organizational levels. Multiple data collection and analysis approaches were applied, including the use of quantitative and qualitative data, surveys, interviews, administrative and city records.

Results from villager surveys across three timepoints demonstrated positive and significant results for some employment as well as health and well-being outcomes. The most notable employment improvement was that three residents who were not working at timepoint 1 were either working or in school at timepoint 3. Health and well-being outcomes also improved, with villagers reporting significant decreases in the number of times their belongings were stolen after moving into BCV, increased life satisfaction levels, and decreased anxiety levels after moving into BCV. At timepoint 1, villagers were asked to self-identify goals for their time at BCV, and at timepoints 2 and 3, they were asked to assess their progress on these goals. On average, they rated themselves as achieving “moderate progress” on self-defined goals.

In addition to quantitative survey findings, qualitative findings from villager interviews provide important lessons about the process that villagers experienced at BCV. Villagers articulated that the community continues to undergo a development process that requires time and understanding. Villagers note that figuring things out for themselves is a critical component of their own Village identity and social cohesion. Villagers also identified that the support system that has been, and is continuing to be, developed in and around their community is foundational. Additionally, they reported feeling safe overall, and many feel they have a voice at BCV.

At the neighborhood level, neighbors reported few if any challenges with BCV. Crime statistics fail to show a consistent increase in crime within close proximity to the Village. Maps of crimes within a quarter-mile and half-mile of BCV illustrate that crime does not appear to be increasing around the immediate vicinity of the Village.

Village Council minutes and interviews with organizational partners demonstrate that some internal and external sense of community was developed at BCV. An internal and external sense of community, also known as social capital or social support, are known to be important factors for improved health and well-being.

The triangulation of results across individual villagers, neighborhood residents, and organizational partners supports the overall conclusion that the first nine months of BCV have been a success. Across purposive samples, random samples, qualitative data and quantitative data, the results all point to the same message: BCV is working. That is not to say that BCV is without challenges. As noted in this report, two of the inaugural members of BCV were expelled. Residents continue to voice concerns about structural issues in the Village, such as electricity, food storage and preparation, water supply, storage space, lighting, and toilets. Some BCV residents are resistant to fully engage in the community.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont.)

One neighborhood resident reported a belief that BCV was responsible for an uptick in local petty crime. Thus, BCV still faces challenges and will continue to face challenges. However, the breadth of positive outcomes reported by individual villagers, neighborhood residents, local crime statistics, and organizational partners far outweigh the challenges reported about the Village. If anything, these challenges inform a continued direction of work and progress, which those connected to the Village have expressed commitment to addressing in a continued and intentional fashion.

INDIVIDUAL VILLAGER OUTCOMES

The demographic characteristics of the 12 BCV residents who participated in this evaluation are displayed in Table 1. Information about relationship status was collected at all three timepoints; however, age, gender, and race/ethnicity were only collected at timepoint 1.

Results from surveys among villagers across three timepoints demonstrated a number of positive and significant results. Employment outcomes improved, most notably in that three residents who were not working at timepoint 1 were either working or in school at timepoint 3. These improvements may be linked to the stability that comes with having a home—an address, a shower, a place to keep one’s belongings, and somewhere to go after work every day. Many health and well-being outcomes also improved, with villagers reporting a significant decrease in the number of times their belongings were stolen after moving into BCV and increased levels of satisfaction as well as decreased anxiety after moving into BCV.

Interestingly, survey data did not reveal significant improvements in financial capabilities. This may be because the evaluation timeframe was too brief to see changes in financial capabilities or that any changes in financial capabilities were too small to be detected by the indicators in this study. It may also be that income caps on benefits, such as Medicaid, prevent individuals from increasing their income or number of work hours for fear of losing their health insurance. This, in turn, can have a ripple effect on the ability to pay off debt, purchase a car, or pursue other forms of employment or education.

We decide what goes on here. It gives people back their confidence and puts people in leadership roles they didn’t know they could do and then excel at.
-BCV Resident
NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Eighteen randomly sampled neighborhood residents and five purposively sampled businesses were asked about their knowledge of BCV and its impact on various aspects of the neighborhood. Table 2 outlines respondent perceptions of the impact of BCV on their neighborhood.

At the neighborhood level, neighbors reported few if any challenges with BCV. Many don’t even realize the Village is there. Crime statistics, provided by the Denver Police Department and reported within close proximity to the Village, are mixed, with some crime categories increasing and a larger number decreasing. Maps of crimes within a quarter-mile and half-mile of BCV illustrate that crime does not appear to be increasing around the immediate vicinity of the Village (see Figure 1). Together, the results from the crime data, a random neighborhood sample, and a purposive sample of local businesses demonstrate that, on average, BCV had either no impact or a positive impact on the neighborhood. These results directly challenge the NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) sentiment that often precedes the development of residences for people experiencing homelessness in a given neighborhood.

Table 2 | Neighborhood Perceptions of BCV Impact (n = 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Respondents Report No Impact/Positive Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic flow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 1 | Maps Comparing Reported Crime from July-December 2016 and July-December 2017
ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

Village Council meeting minutes and interviews with organizational partners demonstrate that some internal and external sense of community was developed at BCV. An internal and external sense of community, also known as social capital or social support, are known to be important factors for improved health and well-being. Yet, there is not a lot known about how to develop a sense of community. The fact that BCV was successful in building an internal and external sense of community should be examined more deeply to determine how this occurred and to attempt to replicate the process in other tiny home communities. It may be that the self-governance structure, the intentional community approach, or even the public attention created an environment that brought many of the villagers together. Common experiences can have a positive impact on the development of a sense of community, and a focus on shared experiences in other tiny home communities could be beneficial.

ADDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS

There are other conclusions to draw from this evaluation. One of the most important is that BCV is an intentional community. Rather than just living in a tiny home, what is meant by intentional community is that villagers are asked to participate in the governance of the Village, to engage and share in one another’s lives, and to seek harmony over mere coexistence with one another. This living arrangement requires a level of negotiation, commitment, and, when necessary, a willingness to engage in conflict resolution. One of the biggest challenges faced by BCV was likely linked to differential commitment to such an intentional community. A significant factor in the differential participation of villagers was identified as a deep and pervasive trauma associated with the experience of homelessness, a trauma that impacts various facets of an individual’s daily life. Tasks such as maintaining shared spaces, securing water, and arranging internet all require collective investment by villagers. Additionally, self-governance, a central aspect of BCV, demands meaningful participation. Villager participation in the intentional community was reported as an ongoing challenge and demonstrates a need for clarity in both agreement among villagers and communication to future villagers and guests with regards to BCV and future tiny home communities.

A lot of people have never lived in community; some were never taught how to. They’ve been through abuse and a hard life and are still working through it. It’s homelessness trauma. -BCV Resident