

Is a Community Center Needed or Not?

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Abstract

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A Community Center has been mentioned and spoken about in Pike County for many years because of the many things it could bring such as a safe place for the youth to hang out as well as for educational and recreational activities. It has also been spoken about in regards to having a place for adults to go and have an opportunity to participate in recreational activities as well as hosting conferences and trainings. The churches have spoken about the opportunities it could provide for them as well such as a larger space to hold funerals and weddings. However, despite all those items, the question still remain whether or not our county needs one or not because many fear it will cost the taxpayers too much money, the county will not be able to sustain it, or just believe one is not needed at all.

In this author's opinion one is needed and in this literature review will illustrate for the reader those reasons why through their own findings and working with members of the community by using a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). According to (Garner & Scott, 2010), a "community-based participatory research... involves the researcher and the subjects working together to drastically reduce the distance that separates them in more typical research studies. Instead of the researcher standing outside of the research, he or she interacts with the community participants to develop a research project that will answer their questions and address their practical concerns, not just to find answers to the researchers' questions" (pg. 5).

Introduction

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On its homepage under History of Pike County, it tells of Pike County becoming established in 1822. It includes six cities that consist of Concord, Hilltop, Meansville, Molena, Williamson, and the county seat Zebulon. Its major and primary industries consist of agriculture and forestry, but most of all the hometown of this author who adores and is passionate about seeing it thrive through its citizens and the things around them. In this county and in the city of Zebulon that this author can remember growing up along with their peers play sports and participate in local activities that were held at their local schools. While during those days it was something that this author and many others in the community would look forward to during the school year, it left them nothing to do or anywhere to go when school was not holding any activities or closed for the summer break. It led this author and some of those peers to find other places and things to do that were not good for a youth to do. It also led others to go without having an opportunity to go somewhere to work on their abilities or learn of their abilities.

This author watched many of his peers go down a dangerous path and had trouble finding their way back because there were no places for them to go and be educated outside of school and to participate in recreational activities. While this author avoided that path along with others, it was because they had an opportunity to go outside of the county to a place that provided those things for their youth. It also served as many other things to the community, so the community at large could enjoy it. This author and others spoke of a place like that being needed for their community, but unfortunately, it fell on deaf ears.

It was in the 90s that this author experienced this and now 20 years later this author finds themselves saying the same thing for the same reasons. While this author now a community leader for Pike County, has been studying the challenges for a leader to build a community center. This author has approached this study by being optimistic about everything and to

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determine whether a community center is needed or not for Pike County. This study conducted by this author through interaction analysis of those who live in the community, researching communities that have experienced this process, and also the resources that could possibly be available to Pike County. It is this author's goal to get as many facts, suggestions and knowledge possible to get to an answer this ultimate question.

In order to fully investigate this matter, this author knows it is going to take a lot of work and research, so it is why he has chosen to use this literature review to help find those answers. In order to find those answers, this author will also use past research and the challenges those researchers came across along with the other research done by this author. According to (Garner & Scott, 2010), a literature presents "present prior findings (both their own and those of others) in a section of the research report" (45).

Review of Literature

While researching this topic in regards to determining whether a community center is needed or wanted, this author must understand it will come with challenges. It also will have to be done with discretion because this author also understands that one is viewed and considered by the members of the community as a Community Leader because of the work one has conducted in the community and is well respected of their views and thoughts. In this case or research on the bases CBPR, this author wants to hear from the community at large first before sharing his thoughts because they want what is best for the community.

(Garner & Scott, 2010) states, "CBPR researchers have a considerable amount of faith in those they are researching and believe that the community understands its situation and that community members are not in a state of misrecognition or (worse) false consciousness.

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The researchers accord respect to local knowledge and the information and beliefs the community brings to the project. The researchers must be prepared to learn from the researched—not only about their beliefs and worldviews (in which ethnographers are also certainly interested) but about their social realities as the community members see them. Of course, the researcher’s belief in the knowledge held by the community is not naïve or unquestioning, and generally the researchers define part of their role to be expanding this knowledge” (pg. 154).

Recognizing how important it is as a community leader, this author understands their role and responsibility along with other leaders in the community in providing leadership to a community that is in need of leadership or guidance in the things needed in their community. This author or leader also recognizes that by being a community leader can help bring about social change that is needed for the betterment of the community as a whole and as well as individually for those who do not see what a community center can do for their community now and in the future, but they must see it together as a community.

In his article *Community Leadership*, Scotney D. Evans cite Hickman in regards to Community Leadership as the “...building power for social change; change in human or community conditions, social structures, dominant cultural beliefs, or prevailing practices.” In researching this ideal of a community center, this author found many challenges stating in their research proposal by using a community-based participatory approach in their research by reviewing past surveys that show that having a community center was a top priority. While this author as well leader is passionate about building a community center, they are interested about it while other members in the community may feel differently. This author decided to interact with members of the community by doing town halls, business- to- business meetings, and forums to hear those members’ or out-group members reasons of not wanting a community center. It will

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also give this author or leader an opportunity to share their reasons why they believe one will be beneficial to the community.

Importance of Listening

According to (Northouse, 2015), listening is one of the most important ways that a leader can respond to out-group members. While it requires paying attention to what people say, it also requires paying attention to what people say, it also requires being attentive to what people mean...Listening requires that a leader set aside his or her own biases in order to allow out-groups members to express their viewpoint freely” (pg. 205). This author or leader knows they could possibly face a lot of backlash in why a community center is not needed, but this author is willing to listen and in return would hope the members would allow the author too show and provide research by specifying the overall need of it and what it could bring to the community overall.

Nick Reynolds mention in his article *New Southside leaders seek to listen, uplift* tell of how listening was key with the Southside leaders. Reynolds, 2016) states, “what I’ve learned everywhere I’ve worked about human beings, the only thing I think is most important is listening...Now I know why we have one mouth and two ears. To me, listening is really key, and I think I’ve learned a lot from that.” This author agree as well because they do not believe one can accomplish anything if both sides are talking at the same time, one side has to listen then allow the next side to the same as they speak. It is also one that this author believes could be done with all the members in Pike County working together in regards to Community Engagement.

Community Engagement

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In her case study, *Asset-Based Community Development*, Suzzane Wood noted, “Community engagement can be defined as people working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realize bold visions for their common future.” In this author’s opinion, Pike’s future depends on what is provided for its youth now so they could be successful and have a place that will provide it for them. This author sees this being done by the community engaging in discussion with not just one another, but also the youth so they can enlighten the members with issues that they are faced with in life. If the community members engaged with them and what is going on around them, in this author’s opinion a community center can provide some of those essential to equip them.

In her article *Harrison Cultural Community Centre leader talks future*, Khadija Smith speaks of an executive director named Peter Ogbuji that spoke to his community about the need of a multipurpose cultural community center by pointing out many of the things that this author has recognized in regards to Pike County too. (Smith, 2017) states, “... a strong foundation to help youngsters stay involved in literacy; provide children with appropriate social and emotional development; offer health, wellness and safety for children, in particular addressing substance and alcohol abuse and obesity; and to have strong community engagement.”

In these face to face meetings with the members of the community that possibly are not in favor of having a community center, this author or leader could also make them aware of how the community center that has youth development programs go along with recreational activities could be very beneficial to the youth in their community. In providing a place where organizations with youth development programs can help the school and the community in the areas that are troubling to the community as well as the state especially those at young age would be very beneficial.

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Importance of Community Participation

In allowing the youth to be engaged with the members of the community as they research this case is not only essential, but also allowing them to participate in this author's opinion is a major concept of importance in the process of answering this ultimate research question. In their book *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth: A Manual for Participation*, David Driskell mentioned that importance. (Driskell, 2011) states, "young people are valuable members of the community, both now and in the future." In this author's opinion, the youth are the ones who would benefit more from having a community center more than all the members of the community and as this author stated earlier in this literature review, it is the responsibility of the community to invest in their youth.

If the community invests in the youth and allow them to be participants with members of the community, it could bring all the members of the community and the community itself closer together. In their article *Benefits and Challenges in Building a Community Youth Development Coalition*, David Campbell and Nancy Erbstein state it not only help create a coalition among their youth, but create a youth master plan.(Campbell & Erbstein, 2010) states, "targeted outreach and relationship development brought together school, city and community leaders, along with engaged youth."

If a community center is placed in Pike County and the youth had a say in the matter, in this author's opinion it could start and build a community youth development coalition that David Campbell and Nancy Erbstein mentioned in their article. According to (Campbell & Erbstein, 2010), "having a visible, recognized place to go for youth issues and concerns, thus helping put these issues on the agenda of community leaders." When involving the youth and allowing them to be part of the discussion in this author's opinion is going to be essential in

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showing why a community center is needed in Pike. In this author's opinion, one should not only allow them to be part of the discussion, but also allow them to serve as participants. It is this author's perspective that it could be a great learning opportunity for their youth. In reviewing these measures and taken everything into account can be best view and be made more clearly by Community Profiling.

Importance of Community Profiling

(Cicognani, 2014) states, "the aim of community profiling was to produce a general description of this local community and of youth, and specifically, of the existing forms of youth participation and of the resources (personal, environmental) available to young people living in this local community for participation. Specific questions that we addressed were the following: number and typologies of youth, their distribution in the territory, occupation (students, working and in which sector), initiatives of the public administration for youth, existing public and private services for youth, youth activities during their free time, young people and volunteering, young people and politics, alcohol and substance use."

In this author's opinion, it is another key reason why it is important to hear the youth thoughts on this matter. In having the youth voice heard and serving as participants, they could share with this author and the others what kind of programs can assist them in overcoming the areas mention by Cicognani. In this author's opinion, if Pike has a community center it could not only provide them with a hangout place, program and activities to participate in but also a place they could volunteer and work. It could serve as a one stop shop for them and a place where Pike County can feel proud of because they have provided something that position our youth to succeed. If Pike County choose not to have a community center to support their youth, in this author's opinion, they would have fail them.

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Findings

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT data center, Pike County ranks 22 out of 159 counties with a 75% in developing their 3rd grade learners on the milestone English Language Arts and rank 54 with a 34.7% among those 3rd graders that were proficient learners. Also the Alcohol & Substance Abuse Prevention Project that works within the Pike County region share on their webpage that alcohol is the 3rd leading cause of death in Georgia and it's the youth ages 9-20 that use alcohol more than any other substance.

While this author or leader understands that it is going to take more than statistics to convince the members to be in favor of getting a community center, in this author's opinion, one-reason members of the community may not see the need of a community center because some may fear the cost associated with having a community center. In researching the two options that were presented in this author's proposal, the members of the community may have seen Option 1 too costly to the county and Option 2 as one that could be beneficial, but only for something else and not that of a community center. This author is seeking in this research for all parties not to allow cost to stop them from listening or engaging with one another, but evaluate the entire process before making a decision.

Whether those things are possibly true or not in regards to cost, one thing this author or leader is willing to do is to sit down with those key members of the community or key participants to evaluate all those options. One thing includes looking at not only building a community center, but possibly building one that could be or become independent. Nick Reynolds noted in his article how the Southside leaders discuss their community center going independently after facing some rough areas that consist of the community center losing vibrancy and focus. In this author's opinion, if the community members as well the key

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participants evaluate Southside issues along with this author or leader, they all could work together and possibly find a way of seeing how a community center could be beneficial to the community and look at all the ways it could possibly be done even if it means building one independently.

This author is willing to take in account everything that would lead them in finding a solution or answer to this research question even if it is determine a community center is not needed, but it is going to take all the participants be willing to find a place to discuss their beliefs on the matter. It is also going take all them in this author's opinion having the willingness to be respectful to everyone's ideals and suggestions that could best serve the community and not them for their own personal gain. (Northouse, 2015) states, "community brings people together and provide a place where they can express similar ideas, values, and opinions, and where they can be heard by members of their team" (p. 201).

Discussion

In this author's opinion, whether or not a community center is needed in the community, all those members in the community that have the resources and are in a position to help and can make the ultimate decisions are the ones that this author knows are needed to serve as participants on this project. This author or leader knew that the challenge was going to be convincing them to serve as participants and explaining why they were the best fit to serve. This author also knew he had to do so by showing how the benefits were not going to just benefit the community, but also them in their respective positions such as City Administrator or Official, County Manager or Commissioner or a member of the church or Development Authority.

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It is these participants and others in their key positions can see a return in being part of this committee because it would provide them the necessary resources not only match the community needs, but their respective organization.

According to (Wood, 2008), “another key component to successful community engagement is that members can see a direct, tangible benefit from their participation...Research demonstrates that when individuals experience a 'return' on their investment of time and resources, community initiatives are more likely to be successful and sustained...working toward small wins is a more feasible way to engage community members and tap into their existing assets.” Also this leader knew the challenge of having those participants help in the research because they brought many ideas and suggestions of their own. In those ideas and suggestions there were some that were contradictory to this author, but they listen to each of their reasons and reasons behind it. In doing a CBPR, in this author’s opinion it is very important that the entire participant not only listen to their thoughts and concerns, but to theirs too.

(Garner & Scott, 2013) states, “instead of the researcher standing outside of the research, he or she interacts with the community participants to develop a research project that will answer their questions and address their practical concerns, not just to find answer to the researchers’ questions” (pg. 5). In this author’s opinion, when you have members of the community as participants when a decision is made and it is brought to the others members of the community. It will be more received from them than someone from the outside, so it is one of the reason why this author reason choose to use CBPR in their research. According to (Minkler, 2004), “A key distinguishing feature of CBPR involves its commitment to ensuring that the topic to be investigated comes from the community.”

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This author also understands that if the group cannot come to a consensus or find a common ground, in their opinion, it would not be a bad idea to bring someone from the outside to serve as a mediator to avoid ethical challenges or issues among them. (Minkler, 2004) states, “Outside researchers interested in engaging with communities in CBPR should facilitate continued dialogue among all partners concerning the many ethical challenges that arise in such work.” In having a mediator or outside researcher, they could very well take from the group such a thing as not building a community center that would cost the county or tax payer money, but use an existing building or build a small one that is cost effective to serve as their community center to start things off.

In doing it that way, this author and members of the community would have time to gather other resources or funding to build the multipurpose that this author seeks out to do. In those efforts Pike would have a community center that would meet some of the needs it currently needs and work towards building on it to meet the needs that could possibly come in the future.

Literature Conclusion

While this author or leader believes the community needs a multipurpose community center, this author is willing to side with the others to start things off with an existing building or building a smaller one until they are able to fund one and is big enough to support the community at large. This author would not be disappointed because a community center will be in Pike County and the next research begins by researching available funds or ways that Pike County can pursue building that community center this author has envisioned for his hometown. This author understand this process is going to be an on-going process, but the participants are going have to be willing to discuss and put forth the effort in seeing it through.

Research Method and Procedure

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In this literature review, the reader should have been able to see that the Community-Based Participatory Research was the best based approach on this research. This author was able to use interacting with the members of the community by listening and engaging them as well allowing key members to serve as participants of this research. It was in this author's opinion, they believe they all could look over the community profile and findings to discuss the matter or issue that could lead to answering whether or not a community center was needed in Pike County. This author would be able to conduct through this research in a way that would bring out many questions and answers that were needed to answer that ultimate question.

Data Collection

When this author meet with the community at large or citizens of Pike County at those town halls, business- to- business meetings, and forums, they would not only listen to them, but also ask those who were willing to do a short survey that would be confidential and use for the purpose of this author's research. (See Figure 1 Citizen Survey at end of Literature Review) This author also would explains to the members that it would be something they along with other leaders could use as a guide in what the community at large seek to see in the community and most important whether or not it is a community center. (Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2012), states, "Involving citizens in making plans is a cornerstone for good planning practice."

In this author's research, this author also would provide those youth and key participants who were willing to do a separate, but confidential survey too. In providing those participants to do a survey as the citizens did too, it would allow this author some finding to evaluate in his research as he gather results to determine who if any believe the community center is needed in Pike County and their reasons. It is within all these groups that makes up the community and very well can give the author what is the shared vision among them all. (Northouse, 2015) states,

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community allows people to accomplish great things. It enables people to work hand in hand in pursuit of a shared vision that supports the common good. Through community, people can promote the greater good of everyone in the group” (pg. 205) (See Figure 2 Youth Participant Survey and Figure 3 Key Participants Survey at end of Literature Review)

In this author’s opinion not only would the surveys allow this author to see whether or not do the groups think a community center is needed in Pike County, but also possibly what kind of design or size think could be needed if they see one is needed. It would also show each group the benefits of having a community center could do for them overall, but most important to this author an opportunity to evaluate and show what the community could build by involving the youth in the discussion on things of the community and through their surveys’ results.

In this author’s opinion, when starting the discussion process and having the youth involve in the process could be very beneficial because they could offer suggestion about the growth and new age of things that are going on in today’s society. In return, the citizens and key members that make up the community could teach them the process of how to go about and make important decisions in their community. According to (Zeldin, Gauley, Krauss, Korbluh, & Collura, 2015), “when youth engage in activities of shared importance with adults, the processes of collective decision making and purposeful action provide a solid foundation for the youth’s own development as well as for others in the setting... “

Results

In this author’s opinion, in this research and all that is gather to start the discussion, the community at large or citizens would be able to evaluate the impact of a community center could have on them; they could possibly recognize that if it is done according to this author in term of a multipurpose facility. The citizens of Pike could finally have a place that is big enough to host

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big events such as a wedding, party, or funeral if needed compared to the small buildings that are currently being used in Pike County.

The youth participants could possibly not be recognize for their part of this research and make a name for themselves, but also will have an opportunity to have a place to be considered a safe haven and provide them an opportunity to participate freely in recreational and educational services. Lastly, those key participants that hold positions in the community and could benefit from the things of the citizens and youth participants because of their departments or organizations they are affiliated with in the community would save cost to their respective programs to by investing some of their programs into the community center.

In this author's opinion, it is a win-win for the key participants and would create a vision that this author seeks out for Pike County because of such things as the key participants recognizing the following things on these potential findings. The City Administrator or City official, in particular Zebulon could find that it would be the city most would prefer a community center since the school and major retails are found in that city. The County Manager or Commissioner would have the opportunity to review the county's budget and see if it matches the need that the community sees as one compared to their own insight.

The Development Authority could review over its resources as well as any developments that also could be available or suggest a community center could be funded in some kind of way. Church members could play a role of evaluating by speaking to their church and the other churches about the thought of getting a community center that could also help in having another place to hold weddings and funerals to keep them from being at only at their respective churches. In all these participants, respective places having an opportunity to do these things in this author's opinion will open other things for the community too.

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In doing this research along with this author, the participants have begun an open dialogue among them that could lead to them doing other work together in the future. It has also brought three groups in a small community together working effectively for the betterment of their community. In this author's opinion, it takes everyone working together, not alone, to get things done for the greater good for a community, so why not be open to working open and collectively together.

Conclusion

The community-based participatory research approach in this author's opinion has also been beneficial to them because the approach is set up on the basis this author likes to handle situations or concerns and that is direct. In using the community-based participatory approach, this author was able to take advantage of its specific methods that deal with collecting information as (Garner & Scott, 2013) noted in their book about interacting with community participants that will answer the researchers' questions or in this author's case question. It was also noted by these authors that this approach that the strategy of using collecting information becomes not just a research study for this author but their study between the researcher and participants.

While the research done by this author has not all been collected and the information needed to determine whether a community center is needed for Pike County, this author believes it has served as a great starting point. It also could be because of this author's dream and passion that just maybe, it would serve as a possibility of this author seeing a community center in Pike County. In this author's opinion, whether or not one a community center is brought to Pike County, this author will be proud to know, they were able to get the discussion started and able to

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start evaluating what is needed to sustain their community and meet the needs of it now and in the future.

The personal interaction with the community members was not only a great opportunity for this author to listen to their thoughts and suggestions, but also an opportunity for them to hear one another. Also during these interactions, this author can tell of their own thoughts and suggestions that show the passion they have along with the whole community and the great work they could do together to bring a community center to their county. In allowing the participants to do the surveys, it also gave this author the necessary framework and data they needed to review over the citizen's desires based on the different groups that make up the Pike County's community. It is one that could be used as a framework for other communities that are facing or seeking the same answers that this author and the other members of Pike County.

Overall, this research has brought joy to this author because it is not something that was done just because of a passion to bring a community center to Pike County. It was also to be a blessing and give this author a sense that this author or leader was able to give back to their community so the community could possibly have something that was not available to them growing up in Pike County. While this author will be overwhelmed with emotions, it is knowing that they had the courage to conduct this research and will seek out to do more.

As a result of this research, this author or leader also would encourage everyone that is able to give back to their community or in position to do more for the community in which they serve or live to do so and watch the blessings that could come from it. It was because of this author or leader asking themselves what they could offer their community that was not available to them as a child that ignited them. This author also looked over the community to see if there were anything needed that could benefit the entire community, what are the things that are set up

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or not for the youth in their community to better them and prepare them for life. Lastly, what can be done by this author to see those things get done. It all came down to this author concluding that a community center was needed and it could address all those issues. The only that was thing left for this author was to seek out and ask the community their thoughts on it.

This author or leader encourages the people of Pike County to continue this research, so an answer could be found and to the other readers that read this research to go out and get the answers needed for your community. “You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it.” (Grace Lee Boggs) One must remember that the youth are our future and we must protect and preserve and provide them with the chance and resources to positively discover and showcase their talent. Building or creating a place for the youth to go afterschool and when school is out for the summer will be the best thing, in this author’s opinion, the community can do. This place is a community center and the youth as well as the adults and the community as a whole will benefit greatly from it.

Figure 1 (Citizen Survey)

Citizen Survey

This survey is to assess the current need of the community through its members, so they can be evaluated and viewed as potential opportunities for Pike County. Your individual responses are important and will be kept in a confidential manner. If you have any concerns or questions please don't hesitate to contact me, Raul Santiago (123) 456-7890, raul97@yahoo.com

1. What city of Pike County do you live in? _____

2. What age group do you follow under? 30- 40 41-50 51-60 61+

3. What type of activities would you like to see Pike offer that is not being offer?

5. Do you think those activities would be best done in a community center? Yes or No

6. If so what size of building would be best fit? Small Medium Large Multipurpose

7. Do you think the community at large would benefit from a community center?

Definitely won't Probably won't Probably will Definitely will

8. If not, what would be your suggestion in seeing those activities done in the community, where and how?

Thank you for your participation, if you have any additional insight or comments please contact me by the information provided at the top of this survey.

Figure 2 (Youth Participant Survey)

Youth Participant Survey

This survey is to assess the current need of the community through its members, so they can be evaluated and viewed as potential opportunities for Pike County. Your individual responses are important and will be kept in a confidential manner. If you have any concerns or questions please don't hesitate to contact me, Raul Santiago (123) 456-7890, raul97@yahoo.com

1. What city of Pike County do you live in? _____

2. What age group do you follow under? 14-16 17-21 22-25 26-29

3. What type of activities would you like to see Pike offer that is not being offer?

5. Do you think those activities would be best done in a community center? Yes or No

6. If so what size of building would be best fit? Small Medium Large Multipurpose

7. Do you think the community at large would benefit from a community center?

Definitely won't Probably won't Probably will Definitely will

8. If not, what would be your suggestion in seeing those activities done in the community, where and how?

9. Do you think Pike has a place for youth to called a safe haven or "hang out" place? Why or Why not?

Thank you for your participation, if you have any additional insight or comments please contact me by the information provided at the top of this survey.

Figure 3 (Key Participants Survey)

Key Members Participant Survey

This survey is to assess the current need of the community through its members, so they can be evaluated and viewed as potential opportunities for Pike County. Your individual responses are important and will be kept in a confidential manner. If you have any concerns or questions please don't hesitate to contact me, Raul Santiago (123) 456-7890, raul97@yahoo.com

1. What city of Pike County do you live in? _____

2. What is the name of your organization, group, business, or classes?

3. What type of activities/services do you think will enhance your program, organization, or business?

5. Do you think those activities/services would be best done in a community center? Yes or No

6. If so what size of building would be best fit? Small Medium Large Multipurpose

7. Do you think the community at large would benefit from a community center?

 Definitely won't Probably won't Probably will Definitely will

8. If not, what would be your suggestion in seeing those activities/services done in the community, where and how?

9. Who would benefit from the activities/services that is needed to enhance your program or business from Pike? How? Why?

Thank you for your participation, if you have any additional insight or comments please contact me by the information provided at the top of this survey.

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