The Watts-Willowbrook community has strong momentum for change and has high levels of local activism and capacity. A concerted effort to collaborate among local organizations exists within the community. This is primarily a result of groups wanting to increase the sustainability of their efforts and provide better services to the community.

The increase in collaboration is made possible by shifting the concentration to clients and patients rather than organizations. Various developments in the area can be “synergistic opportunities,” including the redevelopment of Jordan Downs, the re-opening of Martin Luther King, Jr. hospital in 2012, and the expansion of the Department of Health Services’ Public Private Partnership school-based health center at Jordan High School.

Community leadership in Watts-Willowbrook is described as “collaborative,” “passionate,” “committed,” “hands on,” “in the field” and “competent.”

Why Watts-Willowbrook

Watts-Willowbrook has very high rates of teen births. A high proportion of the community's zero-to-five population participate in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. The area experiences high rates of unemployment, a high percentage of households headed by a single mother with children, and a high percentage of families with children living below the federal poverty level.

The community has relatively high rates (per capita zero-to-five year olds) of parks per square mile and schools. There is also a high rate of organizations focused on the zero-to-five population and is in close proximity to a birthing hospital. Local nonprofits and foundations are also relatively strong as measured by rates of expenditures and public support per capita zero-to-five year olds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Areas of High-Need</th>
<th>Watts-Willowbrook</th>
<th>L.A. County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teen birth rate</td>
<td>4.0 per 1,000</td>
<td>1.4 per 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA Dept. of Public Health, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households with children headed by a single mother</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nielsen Claritas, Inc., 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of zero-to-five year olds participating in WIC programs</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHFE WIC Data Mining Project, 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leadership

“We’ve partnered with everyone around this table. Any time an issue comes up, we’ve done a good job of pulling people together.”

The leadership in the Watts-Willowbrook community is active. Leaders find out about emerging community issues by contacting the Board of Supervisors, talking to families and parents and generally being “in the field.” Leaders are known to each other and have worked in collaboratives with each other. There is a collaborative spirit that helps mitigate competition and has developed among agencies over the years. One focus group participant found that “twenty years ago everyone seemed to be operating independently. Resources weren’t shared or maximized. We’ve stopped doing that. Everything that is done here is done as a collaborative model.” Residents also hold positions within local agencies and mobilize around various community issues, holding health fairs and also holding community events devised by men to outreach to other men in their community.

Infrastructure

“We’re trying to get the City more involved in the community gardens, using over 300 empty lots to transform some into community gardens.”

The infrastructure capacity in the Watts-Willowbrook community is considered healthy and well developed. There is an extensive non-profit infrastructure, including very large organizations like Watts Healthcare Corporation and SHIELDS for Families. The planned reopening of inpatient services at King/Drew Medical Center in 2012 will alleviate the need for residents to seek maternity and emergency services in other communities. Community centers, the Boys and Girls Club and employment assistance programs are prominent in the community. A weekly farmers market is held at Watkins Park.

Engaging Multiple Sectors

“Oh, unless [we] build relationships with faith-based organizations, our clients won’t get what they need.”

The Watts-Willowbrook community sees involvement of multiple sectors in addressing community needs. Local elected officials that represent the area have a “handle and a pulse on the community” and supports the community. Law enforcement engages in the community-driven Watts Gang Task Force and other County agencies meet with the community to identify issues and deliver services to address them. In particular, the faith-based community was one that is seen as very influential in outreaching to families in the community and bringing them together.

Investments

“There are new stores and strip malls, and new housing. I think the businesses have started jumping in to be in place when the transition from housing projects to middle-income housing occurs.”

There are many developments occurring in the Watts-Willowbrook community. First 5 LA investments include Family Literacy and the South LA Best Babies collaborative of the Healthy Births Initiative, as well as School Readiness and Partnership For Families which cover the area. Certain areas see an increase in development, in particular with outdoor shopping areas and new housing. The new Imani Fe Affordable Housing Complex was completed in 2009. There is a $1 billion project to revitalize Jordan Downs housing project and transform it into a “new urban village” with mixed use and housing. The California Community Foundation oversees the Centinela Medical Funds, which resulted after the conversion of Centinela Hospital. The school-based health center at Jordan High School recently received funding from the Department of Health Services for both infrastructure and primary care.

*Unless otherwise noted, this profile was informed by community focus groups and interviews.