# Community Listening Summary—Jackson, MS

The various systems within communities—such as public health, housing, education, and health care—directly influence the health and well-being of community members. One system cannot address the holistic needs and concerns of community members, so systems must work with each other and with community members to collectively align their actions with the needs and priorities of the communities they serve. Shared measurement is one way to do this. Shared measurement uses a common set of measurable goals that reflect shared priorities across systems and with community members.

Ultimately, shared measurement must benefit people and communities, especially those who have experienced health and social inequities. Partnering with community members is essential to ensure that improvement efforts reflect what matters to communities. The American Institutes for Research and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health partnered with The Drs. Aaron and Ollye Shirley Foundation, a local community-based organization, to listen to four community members in Jackson, MS. This listening session was held in August 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and a time of national attention on racial equity and justice. This document summarizes what these community members had experienced with systems and services and what is most important to them when systems and services work together toward a common goal.

## Community Partner Profile: The Drs. Aaron and Ollye Shirley Foundation

The Drs. Aaron and Ollye Shirley Foundation is a nonprofit organization that was established to honor the lives of Dr. Aaron Shirley and Dr. Ollye Shirley, who spent their lives and professional careers concerned with the health and well-being of people in underserved communities. Dr. Aaron Shirley was the first African-American pediatric resident at University of Mississippi Medical Center in 1965. In 1970, he helped to establish the Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center, which became the largest community health center in Mississippi. In 1995, he and a group of partners transformed the Jackson Mall into the Jackson Medical Mall, a health care facility for the underserved.

The Drs. Aaron and Ollye Shirley Foundation coordinates and offers programs to educate, enlighten, monitor, equip, and offer resources to help improve the physical and mental conditions of its participants. Based in Jackson, the foundation is currently engaged in awareness and outreach activities designed to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 in the Mississippi Delta region.

To learn more about The Drs. Aaron and Ollye Shirley Foundation, visit www.theshirleyfoundation.org/.

## What do community members want to see improved?

Community members in Jackson desired improvements in education, policing and public safety, economic development, and homeless shelters and supports. Specifically, community members wanted better schools for their children, more businesses and services within the city, more and better jobs, and more proactive law enforcement to help them feel safer.

## How can community members have an equal role in improvement initiatives?

Community members wanted to be involved in improvement initiatives through discussions with community leaders and systems, with the ability to ask questions and get timely information about services. They felt that leaders needed to share information so that community members could play a role in the improvement initiatives.

> I just wish the leaders would just give us more information on what's going on because there's some things that we don't know. And by improving our community, we just need to know. We just need to know what we need to do from our leaders.

Community members also said that they shared a personal responsibility to improve their community and desired having an equal role in improving their community through pooling resources to uplift one another instead of relying solely on the actions of leaders and systems.

> How would I know that everyone has an equal role in the process? Because we all have to do our part. You can't help me if I'm not willing to help myself. Everyone has to take ownership. If I know about some information, then it's up to me to use it and try to make it work for me. If I have a problem, I know there's people here I can, of course, go and ask. Or research, try to get the information.

Community members also mentioned [Springboard to Opportunities](#) as the primary way that information and opportunities are shared with members of the community, particularly those with fewer resources. Springboard to Opportunities is a nonprofit organization that provides resources to families in affordable housing in Jackson.

## How can communities hold systems and leaders accountable?

Consistent and transparent information from community leaders and systems was the primary method of accountability discussed by community members. They wanted to hear from and engage and collaborate with leaders on a regular schedule, not just during the election cycle. As part of their role in improvement initiatives, community members also said that they, as individuals, should be accountable to help uplift each other.

And these are people [local political leaders] who have held the position for so long, I think they just become so comfortable with what they do and we just become so comfortable with seeing the name, that we vote for them. But just like they want us to vote for them, they're out there pushing it. They need to be doing the same things to let us know that they're trying to make that community better. They hear our voices; we shouldn't have to write letters and make these phone calls when they know what we need. They clearly know what they need. Based on the demographics, based on when the census come[s] out, based on all those things. We just need to see them doing some work.

## How do you know improvements work for everyone?

Community members stated that systems could not work for everyone because the systems have limited resources. Additionally, some felt that personal choice or individual decisions to not receive help prevent community members from accessing needed services.

Unfortunately, as much as we want to include everyone, that's not going to happen. We don't want that to happen, but we know it is because there's some people who just don't want the help or just don't want to do it. But those that are actively seeking [help and] . . . want to be a part of the community, there should be some way that you can sign up, engage in something. Pretty much everything we hear lately has been so negative. Even though it has been that way for a long time, it would be nice to hear. . . . Just to see something working in our favor. But to improve everything for everyone, there's so many issues that could happen or do happen. I just feel like no one should ever be lost, that there should be some way we can . . . if you truly need it or want it, to be able to touch bases or find . . . without having to struggle so much.

Despite limited resources and personal choices, community members said that measuring the success of community improvement focused on actions taken more so than on words or numbers. While information and data are important, it is not as important as results and resources for the community.

I was going to say, I know that the information is out there. All we have to do is use Google search and go to the websites and all that stuff. I don't know if I really want to see a number or another survey. I just want to see results. I would prefer that business[es] start going up; we get our grocery stores back. We don't have to travel 20 minutes to go and do the things that we should right there. . . . I want to be able to have full access to everything that is around without traveling to another city. But just support and keep the revenue in our area. So just to see things change rather than just reading a number.

## Community-Identified Priorities

- Pool resources together to help serve individuals in their community (e.g., create a homeless resource program by donating clothes and other necessities to central offices for pick up by those experiencing homelessness)

- Provide updates about the community, services, and progress toward goals to the community on a routine basis

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT**

Visit www.air.org/sharedmeasurement

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