



The Black Belt Bulletin

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BBCF Believes “We-CAN”

The Black Belt Community Foundation is thrilled about a new initiative in Wilcox County that is a model for progress through community collaboration. The We-CAN (Wilcox Empowerment Community Action Network) Coalition was established in May 2023 through an Interdisciplinary Research Leaders (IRL) program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Founda-



tion. BBCF President Felecia Lucky, and researchers Dr. Lilanta Joy Bradley and Dr. Jen Nickelson comprised the IRL program’s Cohort Six, which initiated the research in the Black Belt leading to the formation of the We-CAN Coalition. The stated mission of the We-CAN coalition is “to build healthier communities by connecting families to resources that will lead to wholesome, healthy, and fulfilling lives at work, school, and play”. The We-CAN coalition includes a combination of community members and partners with a wide range of experience in community organizing, healthcare, family and social services and youth development.



IRL Cohort Six (L to R): Jen Nickelson, Lilanta Joy Bradley, and Felecia Lucky



The We-CAN Coalition meets regularly to discuss strategy and plan projects. Members include: Joy Bradley (IRL), Shelia Dortch, Alicia Parrish Foster, Rosemarie Garner, Kiana George, Samantha Gomez, Stacey Hill, Jacqueline Hives, Ethel Johnson, Naomi Jones, Felecia Lucky (IRL), Treasure McMillian, Jen Nickelson (IRL), Kawana (Shay) Pledger, Carolyn Rothschild, and Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews.

“The We-CAN program in Wilcox County is a grassroots, research-based effort to address the issues of childhood obesity, racism, and rural communities as they impact local Head Start families with children ages birth to five years,” says Lucky. The We-CAN Coalition is evidence of the community’s power to change the structures that cause childhood obesity. On July 22, the Coalition presented practical solutions to the Wilcox County Commission, including the Coalition’s request to rejuvenate the Wilcox County Farmer’s Market.

“We thought the presentation to the Wilcox County Commission was an opportunity for the We-CAN team to share our vision for a revived farmer’s market”, stated Nickelson. The team presented a “logic model” to the commission to explain their vision of the farmer’s market as a way to bring local farmers, artists and community members together to provide a sustainable source of healthy food while supporting the Wilcox County economy. “The commission had the chance to hear their constituents voices and recommendations for addressing the food insecurity issues that are a barrier to childhood wellness”, according to Bradley.



We-CAN asked the Wilcox Co. Commission to support the return of the farmers market in part by upgrading the infrastructure, including power & signage.

Based on their presentation, the team’s proposal culminated with a timeline that would see the return of the Wilcox County Farmer’s Market, with an anticipated grand opening September 7. With the support of the commission, the We-CAN coalition hopes to see the farmer’s market as an ongoing resource for local citizens.

SPOTLIGHT ON – PHOTOVOICE –

One of the research questions that IRL Cohort Six was posed with was: *In what ways do racism, rurality, and childhood obesity impact the lived experience of families of children in a persistent poverty county?*

In order to answer this question, Cohort Six used a method called ‘Photovoice’ - a community-based participatory research method where participants take photos, engage in group sessions to discuss and rank photos, and then write narratives on what the photo means to them.



Part of the BAMA Kids group of Photovoice participants with instructor and artist Carolyn Perez (right).

20 adolescents from the BAMA Kids program will participate in a photovoice project to take photos that capture:

- How racism may affect eating habits, influences on eating practices, and availability of food options
- How living in a rural place affects food choices and availability of food options
- How (lack of?) equity in Wilcox County affects food choices, eating habits, and availability of food options



Left: Ms. Perez shows Jen Nickelson and BAMA Kids Photovoice participants how to work the tripod and how to setup lighting to create the best photo possible. Right: BAMA Kids participants practice setting up dynamic photos.

Primary Goals of Photovoice

1. To enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns
2. To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs
3. To reach policymakers

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