

Case Study: How WeROC's Member-Leaders built local power and won real change (2018-9)

- On a summer day in 2018, WeROC joined with Pastor Kersey and Community Church of God (CCoG) in Ypsilanti to organize a “Porch Patrol” – where WeROC activists joined with members of that congregation to visit neighbors of the church at their doors, to ask about concerns and to *listen*
 - Gathering later at the church, participants realized that one concern that had emerged from many the neighbors and the church members was the impact of the heavy concentration of halfway houses and group homes in the immediate neighborhood, none of which had any real connections to their neighbors or to the larger neighborhood
 - A related deep concern of the pastor and leaders of the church was the growing number of neighbors who arrived at the church in need of often urgent mental health care support.
- Recognizing that the larger community had essentially been relying on caring -- but untrained and under-resourced -- “providers” like the churches to shoulder the burdens of mental health care, WeROC and our new allies from CCoG joined the County-wide campaign to pass a major mental health and public safety funding millage, on that year’s ballot.
- When the millage passed with surprisingly broad and deep support in every part of the county, the new WeROC Mental Health Equity Action Team got busy figuring out how we could make sure the \$5 million/year for Community Mental Health (CMH), and \$5 million/year for the Sheriff’s Department, would be spent most effectively, for the biggest possible “bang” in service improvement for the bucks that County taxpayers had generously supported.
- At first, the WeROC Action Team members sensed that CMH leadership had not expected and did not see a community role in “their business” as a positive thing
- However, that began to change as the Action Team took several actions:
 - The Action Team invited CMH Director to a meeting (in the basement of another WeROC church), where she cautiously shared some potential plans for the Millage dollars but made no commitments to the group.
 - At community meetings that CMH set up, the ATeam turned out in numbers, primarily to build relationships and to make the point that accessible and coordinated emergency mental health services were highest on the priority list for new services that we were hearing from community residents and leaders.
 - The CMH Director agreed to appear at the major Public Meeting that WeROC was planning. Along with decision makers brought to the Meeting by other WeROC Action Teams, the CMH director made her first public commitments, including agreeing to meet with the WeROC ATeam regularly, starting in a few weeks.
- A noticeable change in tone had occurred by the time of the first bi-weekly meeting. About 10 WeROC member-leaders met with the Director and several of her key staff.
 - It was clear that they *now* saw WeROC’s grassroots engagement with them differently -- not as a nuisance, or something to check off to argue they had spoken to the community before making key decisions – but rather as a valuable asset to their work, as something that helped the Director do a better job of actually meeting the community’s needs.
- WeROC member-leaders are proud that their work was in part responsible for success in achieving and improving major CMH programs, including implementing coordinated mental health emergency crisis care services and holding mental health “first aid” trainings around the County.
- **Major Lessons:** Even without professional credentials, community members can quickly learn about an issue AND about the existing local power dynamics, and they have effective tools available to build and use their collective power in healthy ways -- to make real change that affects thousands of neighbors.