

# Community Power-Ups

## *An Evaluation Report Prepared for Interfaith Action*



“[Community Power-Ups sessions] speak to my life and the lives of people I know... Every topic they’ve had has hit me or someone in my circle or in my family. All of them were very important. That’s why I hate to miss one.”

– Community member participant

Community Power-Ups are free monthly events with dinner, live jazz, and practical education on work, finances, legal issues, housing, and other important topics. Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul, along with their partners LSS Financial Consulting, Sunrise Banks, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, the Mobile Jazz Project, and the Saint Paul Black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, sponsor these events for community members to gather, engage, and support one another around issues that are of importance to the community, as well as to provide access to information and services to help people address these issues. See the sidebar for a listing of all 2019 Community Power-Ups session dates and topics.

April 4, 2019	Make your money last to the end of the month
May 2, 2019	Knock down debt, Build up credit
June 6, 2019	Why do I need a will? What is a health care directive?
July 11, 2019	Transformation through meaningful employment
Aug. 8, 2019	Clear your criminal record and erase an eviction
Sep. 5, 2019	Problem with your landlord?
Oct.3, 2019	What is child abuse?
Nov. 7, 2019	Gun violence
Dec. 5, 2019	Transformative stories

Wilder Research was contracted by Interfaith Action to evaluate the Community Power-Ups program to learn more about the positive impacts of the programs and to identify areas for improvement. This evaluation will be used by Interfaith Action and their partners to improve the program and to seek funding and support to continue the program. This report can also be used by other organizations and communities that want to start a similar program, to learn more about what works to engage community members and help them access resources and take actions to address important issues in their lives.

Wilder Research developed a short survey that Interfaith Action staff administered to 21 participants at the Community Power-Ups events in August, September, and October 2019. We also developed an in-depth interview that Interfaith Action volunteers conducted with four Community Power-Ups participants who had attended multiple sessions in 2019. These two sources of data form the basis of this report.



## Key findings

***Participants felt comfortable and welcome at Community Power-Ups, and all participants who completed a survey planned to attend another session in the future.***

Interview participants reported first hearing about the Community Power-Ups program from a friend, their church, or the homeless shelter where they were staying. While a majority of survey participants were attending a Community Power-Ups session for the first time (59%), others reported having attended four sessions or more (27%). Among interview participants, some reported having attended every session or almost every session since the Community Power-Ups program started. All survey participants planned to attend another session in the future.

All participants agreed that the location of Community Power-Ups was convenient, comfortable, and welcoming. Interview participants also reported that the location was easily accessible by multiple modes of transportation (personal vehicle, public transportation, or shelter bus).

*It was very nice place. People are very, very nice there. The whole atmosphere was wonderful. There's nothing else you can say about it.*

***Participants found the information trustworthy and understandable, and would recommend the Community Power-Ups program to their family and friends.***

All survey participants reported that their overall experience with the Community Power-Ups session was either excellent (64%) or good (36%). When asked to select which parts of the Community Power-Ups session were most helpful to them, survey participants most frequently named an item specific to that session's topic area (83% of respondents), followed by a chance to connect with their neighbors (35%), a hot meal (35%), and live music (26%). All participants agreed that they would recommend the Community Power-Ups program to their family and friends (among these, 81% strongly agreed).

Participants reported trusting the information presented at Community Power-Ups sessions, as well as the organizers and presenters themselves. All survey participants either strongly agreed (68%) or agreed (32%) with the statement, "I trust the information I received at this session." Additionally, interview participants reported that all session topics and materials were easy for them to understand.

*It's plain and simple. Even someone who hadn't gotten out of school, they could understand it. It's simple and not over-your-head language. Everything is simple and right to the point.*

However, in relation to the session on tenant rights, one participant noted that some members of the community do not trust Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, due to a public perception that they are more likely to side with the landlord than the tenant during a dispute.

***All interview participants found the Community Power-Ups session topics important, helpful, and relevant to their lives.***

Notably, when asked which session topics were most helpful, all interview participants named the session on tenant rights. Participants also reported that the sessions on wills and advanced directives, criminal record and eviction expungement, credit history, gun violence, and transformative stories were particularly helpful.

One interview participant wished that the session on child protection and safety had provided more advice on parenting, anger management, and child discipline. Additionally, some interview participants noted that they have experienced difficulty accessing legal services from the presenters following the Community Power-Ups sessions.

When survey and interview participants were asked which topics they would like the Community Power-Ups program to cover in the future, they requested sessions on homeownership, the education system, student loans, child custody, the Census, mental health, anger management, community violence prevention and personal safety, discussions with local politicians and leaders about community issues, and a version of the Ujamaa program for women. Additionally, participants requested that a number of topics be repeated, including wills, taxes, budgeting, criminal expungement, credit history repair, renters' rights, and transformative stories.

***Participants have used the information from Community Power-Ups sessions to take action in their own lives, and have shared what they have learned with others.***

All survey participants reported that they will be able to use the information they received at the Community Power-Ups session, and nearly all (95%) participants reported that they will share the information they received at the session with their family and friends.

Interview participants reported that they have already used the information from the session to re-do their family budget, set up a will, and find out if they have an unlawful detainer. Participants also reported that they have already shared the information with others in their community, including information about how to start a budget, how to file taxes, unlawful detainers and renters' rights, and the Sunrise Banks' credit builder loan. Some participants reported carrying presenters' contact information with them so they would be able to make a referral in case they met someone who needed help.

Survey participants reported that as a result of what they had learned at the Community Power-Ups sessions, they planned to pursue expungement of criminal records, seek legal help with an eviction, contact their landlord regarding repairs, share information with others in their community, and tell others about the Community Power-Ups program.

Because of the Community Power-Ups program, interview participants reported seeing legal aid lawyers as a viable and useful resource, feeling inspired and having more hope, and having a greater understanding of how they can pass on what they learned in Community Power-Ups sessions to others in their community.

*[The Ujamaa program] was just inspiring. And uplifting for people like us to hear that, living in the station we're in. Sometimes we don't feel like we have a leg to stand on or hope. And to see something like that is inspiring. It makes you want to get up and network for the betterment of yourself and your family. That was amazing.*

When asked about the impacts of the Community Power-Ups program on their family, neighborhood or community, participants named how “helpful” and “eye-opening” the sessions have been for them, how they have shared the information they learned with others, and how the program has “had a positive effect on everybody”. However, some participants shared frustrations about persistent larger issues in their community, including lack of community engagement among local politicians and leaders, and neighborhood violence.

*I haven't seen any changes in the neighborhood. Violence is everywhere. I'm tired of hearing it and looking at it. I know there is going to be violence everywhere you go.*



## Issues to consider

The following are issues to consider that Wilder Research identified as we reviewed the feedback from Community Power-Ups participants as described above.

- The Community Power-Ups program should advertise more to young people, as some sessions, such as budgeting, would be “really helpful to people just starting out.”
- Community Power-Ups sessions could be held at different times of day to accommodate different peoples’ needs and schedules, such as during times when children are at school. Alternatively, the Community Power-Ups program could provide on-site child care, for participants who need to bring their children along to the sessions.
- One participant noted how much they appreciated the Community Power-Ups session with the police officer, which was “like talking across the fence to your neighbor. He was just that hands on.” Community Power-Ups should bring more local community leaders and decision-makers to the sessions not only to speak, but also to listen to the problems people are experiencing in their community.
- Community Power-Ups organizers should follow up with participants and presenters, as needed, to ensure that referrals don’t fall through and that participants are getting the services they need.

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#### For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Community Power-Ups Evaluation*. For more information about this report, contact Nicole MartinRogers at Wilder Research, 651-280-2682.

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