

Salisbury University's Re-envisioning Ethics Access and Community Humanities (REACH) Initiative: Integrating Community and Curricular Ethics is grant-funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Humanities Connections Program. REACH, led by Co-Directors Michèle Schlehofer, Timothy Stock and Jennifer Nyland, focuses on ethics, ethics literacy and ethics agency through new curricular and co-curricular resources, and connecting with the community.

REACH Team Presents at Lily Conference



On January 9, REACH Co-Director Dr. Jennifer Nyland presented at the San Diego ITLC Lilly Conference Innovative Strategies to Advance Student Learning. She presented about the classroom experiences from using our community-sourced materials: "Ethics Across the Disciplines: Teaching Ethics with Community Case Studies." The presentation was well-attended and many educators from across the country commented that they were inspired by the community-focused nature of our project.

Transitioning REACH

This spring marks five years of the Re-Envisioning Access and Community Humanities (REACH) Initiative. During this time, the REACH Initiative has worked to establish a process for ethical enfranchisement of members of our broader community into ethics conversations and has changed how we think about and teach ethics here at Salisbury University. We are proud of the conversations we have convened, the partnerships we have forged and, most of all, the opportunity to work with all of you!

But as the current phase of our project is drawing to a close, we are sorry to share that this will be our last newsletter. We take a moment to document some of the impact that REACH has had on our campus and in our area.

In our local organizing and scholarly community:

1. Created a Community Advisory Board to ensure that we had feedback from members of our local community.
2. Held listening sessions to gain insight from local community residents on pressing ethical issues.
3. Prepared three White Papers on ethical topics: (1) the use of apology letter banks in restorative justice practices; (2) criminal background checks and lookback periods in housing applications; and (3) a framing document for studying ethics in policing practices.
4. Conducted ongoing workshops and trainings in partnerships with area nonprofits and the Lower Shore Nonprofit Summit.
5. Regularly reported to our Community Ethics Network and fielded ethics queries and requests.
6. Distributed the REACH model at national and international conferences.

On our campus:

7. Prepared 12 case studies summarizing pressing ethical issues in our local community for use in teaching and training.
8. Implemented Ethics Across the Curriculum workshops for Salisbury University faculty on ethics education. A total of 34 faculty participated in the workshop.
9. Held drop-in class sessions to educate students across our campus on ethics.
10. Held regular workshops with faculty across campus on ethics education.

Our work will remain available on the [REACH website](#), and members of the REACH team are available for contract work in our community. Please feel free to reach out to any of us individually or contact us at REACH@Salisbury.edu.

ETHICS PROFILE: Danielle Thomas, Ed.D.

Child Trafficking Regional Navigator, Life Crisis Center



Tell us about your organization and what you do.

The Life Crisis Center (LCC) is a local non-profit agency that was established in 1976. The center's mission is to improve the quality of life in our community through crisis intervention and violence prevention. Our team uses national best practice treatment models to serve Wicomico, Worcester and Somerset counties.

We advocate for and provide a wide range of services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and human trafficking. Through prevention, intervention, therapy, legal services, advocacy and collaboration, we work to provide a safe place for healing. Some of the comprehensive support services offered to the community include a 19-bed safe home, intensive case management, supervised visitation, counseling, legal services, victim support, abuser groups and outreach. LCC also houses the suicide hotline and is the designated information and referral center for Maryland 2-1-1 for the entire Eastern Shore of Maryland.

As the Child Trafficking Regional Navigator, I coordinate LCC's human trafficking program for the Lower Shore where we serve suspected and identified victims of sex and labor trafficking.

The Regional Navigator Program complies with Maryland's Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act of 2019 that places a Navigator in every county throughout the state of Maryland, specifically for providing services to child victims of sex and labor trafficking. Our team works with youth and their families providing prevention education and resources to address and eliminate factors that increase the risk of exploitation. Through an array of supportive and therapeutic services at LCC, it is our hope that survivors and their families find healing and hope for the future.

What drew you to be a part of the Community Ethics Network?

Ethics and ethical practices are what ground us in equality and equal opportunities for success. Human trafficking is a crime of power that commodifies humans, taking freedom for personal profit. I was drawn to the Community Ethics Network mainly because of the collaboration intertwined with REACH's mission. Community collaboration is critical in establishing a societal baseline for ethical conversations, especially as it pertains to anti-human trafficking work. Plus, as an SU alumna, it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up!

How does ethics improve your work?

Human traffickers target people's vulnerabilities and use them as a weapon, creating a psychological hold where victims believe they are trapped. Traffickers do this through force or threats of force, fraudulent promises, or manipulation. Many of these vulnerabilities are centered around basic needs, including, but not limited to, housing, food, clothing and transportation. Child sex trafficking occurs when a child exchanges sex for basic needs or items of value (money, drugs, shelter). Our program focuses on helping the youth and their family secure these basic needs to reduce the risk of exploitation. Ethical issues such as housing or a lack of resources easily increase the risk of exploitation simply because people will use what they have to get their needs met. This is especially true for our youth who have experienced child abuse, childhood trauma or who have a high rate of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Ethics improve our community, which directly impacts the work that I do with youth survivors and their families. Anti-trafficking advocates rely on our community to be educated on what human trafficking is, the risk factors of exploitation, the signs of victimization and how to report suspected trafficking. If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, domestic violence or sexual assault, please call our 24/7 hotline 410-749-HELP.

Housing Affordability in Wicomico County

In spring 2024, Dr. Michele Schlehofer of the REACH Initiative led a county-wide study exploring perceptions of housing affordability in Wicomico County. Housing affordability is defined as when a family can afford housing while still having enough money for other needs (Johnson et al., 2019). A mixed methodology study consisting of two phases was conducted. First, 14 community stakeholders working in either the real estate or nonprofit sector were interviewed about their perceptions of housing affordability, scope of impact and possible solutions. Second, these interviews then informed a community-based survey of 225 Wicomico County residents (33.3% of whom were students) to better-understand their experiences. Five key takeaways from our study are:

Housing Affordability Is a Challenge in Our Community. Both phases of the project concurred that housing was largely unaffordable in our area, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of affordable housing was found across all socio-demographic groups. Residents reported paying an average of \$1,057.51 for monthly housing, at 46% of their monthly income. Residents reported housing expenses impeded their ability to pay for other household necessities. Racial differences also emerged, with residents of color reporting paying significantly more for housing in comparison to White residents. However, generally people were also relatively satisfied with their housing.

Perceptions of Causes of Housing Affordability Were Variable. Stakeholders in Phase 1 saw the causes of housing affordability differently. Those working in the real estate industry believed that high costs for landlords coupled with qualifications of tenants – that is, tenants with low credit scores, prior evictions or lower income – were the primary factors that made housing unaffordable. However, people in the nonprofit sector, while recognizing landlord costs were high, perceived a more complex array of contributing factors, such as lack of area employment opportunities for tenants and lack of awareness of tenant rights. All stakeholders mentioned misleading or unethical housing practices engaged in by some local property management companies as problematic contributors to rising costs for tenants.

There Is a Lack of Community Resources. Stakeholders in the nonprofit sector and community residents noted a lack of available community resources to assist with housing costs. About 45.3% of residents sought outside assistance to help with housing costs; however, less than 22% sought assistance from an agency or organization, instead seeking help from friends or family. Stakeholders in the real estate sector overestimated the prevalence of assistance programs available in our community.

Lack of Affordable Housing Is Associated with Poorer Mental Wellbeing. Among residents who participated in the Phase 2 community survey, those who felt their housing was less affordable and who paid more for housing also reported more rumination on their housing situation and experienced more negative and less positive mood, suggesting that lack of access to affordable housing has negative implications for mental wellbeing.

Addressing Housing Affordability Requires Complex Actions. Stakeholders in Phase 1 had multiple ideas for improving access to affordable housing in our community. These ideas were classified into five categories:

- **Education.** Provide financial literacy classes and educate tenants on their rights.
- **Legislation.** Legislative suggestions included enacting policies that restricted unethical practices among landlords, such as an ordinance prohibiting landlords from accepting payments for housing applications while prospective tenants are on a wait list, enforcing existing anti-discrimination laws, and reversing restrictions in Salisbury on the number of unrelated people who can rent an apartment unit.
- **Attract Growth.** Stakeholders suggested that city and county governments could attract growth to the area with incentives for employers, housing developers and potential homeowners. Waivers on capital gains taxes could incentivize sales.
- **Create Assistance Programs.** Programs such as maintenance repairs for elderly adults aging in place, rental assistance programs and the establishment of a community land trust could help address housing costs.
- **Public Connections.** Finally, initiatives that foster public connections, such as repositories of resources and available housing or creating space for area business, nonprofit and government leaders to hear from people most impacted by housing, would help create change.

The full report will soon be available on the REACH website.

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