# Community Practice Bulletin

## Taking Action in the Community

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### Building Examples of Community Psychology in Practice:

### Eliciting Student Contributions to the Community Tool Box

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This article is about more than classwork in Egypt, it about the classes that use the Community-Based Learning (CBL) Methodology at the American University in Cairo. This methodology could (and perhaps should) be applied in community psychology education everywhere, to relate theory from classroom to practice. Using CBL, students engage in a project within a community, where they benefit the community through what they have learnt, in parallel to reaching academic rigors. One of these classes is the introductory community psychology course. For the past three semesters, part of the CBL component was for students to collect examples for the Community Tool Box.

In order to deepen their understanding of the course material, and build their networks in the field, students engaged in a group project with the aim to contribute to the Community Tool Box, including its new Arabic translation (http://ctb.ku.edu/ar). The Community Tool Box is a free, online resource for those working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. The Community Tool Box contains "Toolkits" which outline key tasks and examples for sixteen core competencies of community work (e.g., creating coalitions and partnerships, assessing community needs and resources, strategic and action planning, advocating for change, evaluating the initiative, sustaining the effort).The Community Tool Box (CTB) (housed by the University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and

Development) reaches more than 5.8 million people annually from 230 countries worldwide. The Tool Box builds the skills of professionals and local leaders working to improve community health and development. The structure of the CTB supports multiple languages, and content is currently available in English, Spanish, and Arabic. It is a high priority to make these resources available—both translated as well as culturally adapted—in these and additional languages in order to be able to ensure access to these free tools and resources. Including regionally relevant examples of community action are critical. Students were tasked with developing an example to illustrate implementation of a competency covered in one of the Community Tool Box's toolkits. They collected examples from Arab Countries for the Arabic website to help further contextualize the website for the Middle East North Africa Region. Going out to the field and reaching out to organizations from whom they collect examples that fit each toolkit enriches student knowledge about the course content, and more importantly, gets them to build their network in the field and professional experience.

This project included multiple steps for student pairs to complete, beginning with selecting a toolkit topic they were interested in exploring more deeply and identifying a community organization that has implemented that competency well. For example, a student group may select Community Tool Box Toolkit 2: Assessing community needs and resources. Then, students identified an organization, research group, or initiative that assessed the community's needs and resources to inform their work. Secondly, students got in contact with the organization to set an appointment and introduce the project to them. This step emphasized the importance of students' professionalism; which was required in order for the organization to agree to participate in interviews. Third, students designed and conducted interviews. Every toolkit has a specific outline that covers the content in a rich way. Students looked at the outline and derived their interview questions in order to collect sufficient data to write the example. Students formulated a consent form for the interviewees to sign notifying

them that the data may be published. Then, students conducted interviews with representatives from their chosen organization. Lastly, students wrote and presented the examples to their student colleagues. Students wrote the examples in English and translated them into Arabic so that the materials could be made available online in English and Arabic. Examples were presented through a video presentation to the whole class. Students then reflected on the whole experience, from choosing the toolkit and organization to writing the example in both languages and presenting it.

Students shared in class reflections that this experience was interesting and beneficial. The benefits and gains from this experience are skills related to the implementation of the assignment; in addition knowledge of the organizations, communities, and the field. As for the skills gained, participants shared they learned professional skills when contacting the organizations and conducting the interviews. Students faced some challenges choosing the toolkits and identifying fitting organizations, but this got them to work together to reach their goals. Additionally, designing and conducting the interviews and writing the example enhanced their research, interviewing, and writing skills. Many students shared the most challenging part of the assignment was to write the example in Arabic due to minimal usage of the language at AUC; yet, this part was a crucial part of the whole experience. This is so because students at the American University in Cairo are taught north American community psychology. Yet, accounting for the cultural differences and implementation is necessary to be conveyed to the students. Also, needing to fit the needs of the community, arabic proficiency is an essential part. Moreover, some mentioned that they gained experience in being able to deal with different people and also keeping in mind how to present the data in a way that would reach a wider audience. They were keen on making sure that the examples are rich, cover the most important parts, fit the selected toolkit, display the work of the organization in an adequate way, and most importantly were written in a way to reach a wide

audience and benefit as many people as possible. Additionally, coming up with the video presentation pushed them to be creative and gain skills related to moviemaking.

As for the knowledge gained, some mentioned that collecting the examples enabled them to relate many of the concepts studied in class to reality; which made learning them easier and more relatable. Digging deeper in the toolkits enriched their knowledge on the topics and familiarized them with the Community Tool Box. Students reported that they would be more likely to use the available web-based Community Tool Box resources when implementing their projects in the future. Students enjoyed contacting community organizations and learning more about what they do. Some chose organizations that advocate for issues they personally feel strongly about; accordingly, getting in contact with them made them eager to learn more and even join them and help out. Furthermore, students felt that the experience broadened their perspective and gave them insight into what is being done in the community and what they could do. It additionally made students more aware of how community psychology practices are implemented and made them realize the impact of activities on the bigger picture.

The main aim for this assignment was to get the students to relate theory with action; dig deeper into the theory and go out to the world to find examples and practice that relate. They gained the knowledge about the communities, the different projects and programs implemented by different organizations, in addition to several skills. The experience was beneficial and students gained the designed for outcomes. "I believe that this assignment was [a] perfect example that showed how theories can be implemented in practical life."

Moreso, this project and the partnership with the American University of Cairo has impacted the Community Tool Box as it helped develop additional regionally- appropriate examples to feature for development efforts in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Collecting the examples and integrating such project in the classroom provide beneficial

examples for students of building partnerships, contributing to a larger project and the community, and develop skills and network. This is a clear demonstration of linking between classroom education and practice; which are both beneficial for the students and the field.

In conclusion, this partnership provides multiple benefits, including: building student skills and experience; providing a meaningful service-learning experience; lifting up stories of community initiatives implementing core competencies; providing students meaningful interactions with potential employers or interns; and building on the global example set of community competencies implemented for change and improvement. This simple project and partnership is encouraged to be replicated by practitioners and instructors in different settings, to spread best practice and further link between theory and practice.

*This is one of a series of bulletins, formerly titled Theory into Action, highlighting the use of community psychology in practice. Comments, suggestions, and questions are welcome. Please direct them to Tabitha Underwood at underwoodtabitha@gmail.com.*