

Building coastal resilience through youth-led community conversations

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The overarching objective of this project is to characterize how youth in Craven County conceptualize coastal hazards and resilience efforts as well as to investigate how youth-led conversations might build common understanding and commitment to local coastal and disaster resilience efforts. This project was implemented in collaboration with the New Bern Boys and Girls Club, NC State faculty, a graduate student, and undergraduate students majoring in environmental science.

Seven undergraduate students worked with the teen center to co-develop and implement educational activities addressing coastal resiliency. About 10 education activities on coastal resiliency have been conducted through a participatory process on topics relating to flooding, hurricanes, and community advocacy. The dynamic nature of COVID-19 has continued to create a few challenges. For instance, all of the activities have been delivered virtually, as we have not been able to get permission to visit the teens in person. In December, the New Bern BGC had staffing changes, which resulted in a change in point of contact and collaborator (VeQuain Joyner left, and was replaced by Cierra King). Both Mr. Joyner and Ms. King have been enthusiastic partners, but understandably, Ms. King has been busy in her new role and found it challenging to devote time to this project. Further, the New Bern BGC has also lost access to reliable internet during the project. Accordingly, the last several lessons were recorded rather than delivered live. We were not able to visit the New Bern BGC in person at all, which will make the community engagement event challenging to complete within this grant cycle, and the planned data collection has just not been possible. Instead, however, we left the teens with guidelines for how to engage with partners (e.g., Christy Perrin; NC Sea Grant/WRRI) to implement a rain garden or other similar project on the BGC grounds. PI Stevenson is committed to following up with Ms. King after the grant cycle to ensure the teens feel supported if they'd like to pursue this option. Similarly, Dr. Stevenson has several congruent projects that will continue, and she plans to offer continued engagement through those to the teens.

Despite challenges, this project has been associated with several key benefits. The NC State students have received environmental education outreach training and experience; social research training in action research; science communication skills; the opportunity to network with community-based organizations engaged in grassroots projects on environmental education. The New Bern BGC teens have had the opportunity to learn more about coastal resilience, interact with NC State undergraduate students, and gain training to implement an action project in their communities. We see this project as laying the groundwork for future engaged research partnerships. Dr. Stevenson has several current (NC Sea Grant) and pending (NOAA, NSF) projects that aim to work with the Boys and Girls Clubs in the Coastal Plain. This project has been helpful in piloting ideas, activities, and systems of engagement between NC State and the New Bern BGC. We look forward to seeing how this partnership develops.