

Appendix C

Summary of Arkansas Study Circle Project Results
Part of the Natural Wonders Partnership Initiative

Sarah Elizabeth Pitman
Extern, Arkansas Advocates for Families and Children

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SUMMARY OF ARKANSAS STUDY CIRCLE PROJECT RESULTS PART OF THE NATURAL WONDERS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

BACKGROUND

In the months of February and March, 2008, five communities across the state met to participate in the Arkansas Study Circle Project. Several Northwest Arkansas (NWA) communities, Mena, Jacksonville, Hamburg, and Paragould participated in the project, which included at least one town from each of the five regions of the state. The communities formed what are called study circles, or small groups of 8-12 people who met to discuss and explore a variety of beliefs and concerns.¹ The study circles were led by facilitators and recorders who were trained to provide impartial guidance for the discussions.

The different communities organized their study circles in different ways. Some communities had only one circle, others broke their groups into three or four study circles, Mena had one Hispanic circle and one non-Hispanic circle. However, each circle met for three or four sessions, and each session had a “theme.” Although no specific topics were raised for discussion by the facilitators, each session was designed to concentrate on one specific area or question. In session one, the circles were supposed to answer “how does our community contribute to the health and well-being of children and their families?” In session two, the question was “what challenges do children in our community face?” “How can we make our community a healthier place for children and their families?” was the question addressed in session three. And, in the final session the groups generated some action ideas by answering the question “what can we do?”²

¹ Taken from the Arkansas Study Circles Project Facilitator and Recorder Training PowerPoint presentation.

² All of the information regarding study circle topics was taken from *Growing Communities Where All Children Can Thrive*. A project of the Arkansas School Board Association in partnership with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families as part of the Natural Wonders Partnership Initiative.

This report represents a summary of the data gathered from those study circle discussions. It is a comprehensive report of the concerns of these communities and what they hope to see for their children. Throughout the report, comparisons will be drawn between concerns and ideas generated by the study circles and the findings of the Natural Wonders telephone survey (NWTs). This data will then be compared to other data collected as part of the Natural Wonders Partnership, resulting in a comprehensive report of the health and well-being of children in Arkansas and what can be done to improve it.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE COMMUNITIES AND THE CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS

Since the Arkansas Study Circle Project was supposed to provide feedback on what people in the community saw as the most important needs of their children, a good place to begin analyzing the discussion results is finding out if the study circles' participants accurately represent the communities where they were held. Arkansas, as a state, had a population of 2,810,872 in 2006. Approximately 81% of the population in Arkansas classified themselves as Caucasian in 2006. For the same year, 15.7% classified themselves as African American, and 5.0% classified themselves as Hispanic (and some other race). Only 75.3% of Arkansans over 25 had graduated high school in 2000, as compared with the 80.4% nationwide. Statistics on higher education are even worse, with only 16.7% having a bachelor's degree or higher in Arkansas in 2000. Nationwide, approximately 24.4% of the population had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher that year. The median household income for Arkansas in 2004 was \$35,295, as compared with the national median household income of \$44,334. The statistics for the state indicate that overall, Arkansas is considered a "poor" state with fewer resources per household.

The communities to report back on their demographic information were Hamburg, Paragould, Mena's Hispanic circle and NWA. These communities had a total of 81 participants. Of these 81

participants, 53 were Caucasian (65.43%), 6 were African American (7.41%), 16 were Hispanic or Latino (19.75%), and 6 (7.41%) were of another ethnicity or considered themselves of “mixed race.” Although these demographics do not exactly reflect those of the state, they are fairly close. However, the median income and education level of the study circle participants was considerably higher than the average Arkansan.

As was stated before the average income for a household in Arkansas was \$35,295 in 2004. Most of the participants of the study circles fell within the \$25,000-50,000 income range (36 out of 81, or 44.44%). However, another 35.8% stated that their income was higher than \$50,000 dollars (7.41%, or 6 participants, said their income was over \$100,000 per year). Only 18.52% of the participants claimed an income below \$25,000 a year. In a state where 15.6% of the population fell below the poverty line in 2004, the income level for these study circle groups seems high.³

The study circle participants were on average more educated than a typical Arkansas citizen. While only 16.7% of the total population over 25 in Arkansas had obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher in 2000, 61.73% of the study circle participants have graduated from college or have an advanced degree.⁴ And while 24.7% of all Arkansans over 25 had not graduated from high school in 2000, only 4 participants out of the 81 (4.94%) had not.⁵ So although the racial diversity of the study circles approximately mirrors that of the state, the education and income level of the study circle participants does not. This could be important to note when looking at the concerns raised during the discussions.

³ It should be noted that one person from the NWA study circles did not report their income.

⁴ The participant questionnaire classifies groups into those who have attended “some college” or have “graduated college” without specifying whether it was an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree.

⁵ There were three participants in Mena’s Hispanic circle that were still in High School, meaning only one participant had not graduated from high school (1.23%).

THE DISCUSSION: THOUGHTS ON THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ARKANSAS'S CHILDREN

During session three the study circles were asked to create a community report card and to grade their communities in each of the different areas. These report cards were designed to generate discussions about the successes and the challenges that each community faces. The participants were asked to rank the following eight areas: education, employment, healthcare, leadership, social services, media, criminal justice, and public works. This section of the report will be divided into each topic area, the grade it received, and thoughts and concerns that each topic generated. Also, the report will include ideas for action that arose out of the study group's discussion of each topic. Other topics that the circles felt were particularly important but were not addressed by the report card were family and community. Family and community has its own subsection at the end of the report.

Education

The circle participants were asked to grade their communities based on whether "every child receives a quality education" in their community. The average grade for all of the study circles was a C, which was defined as "we are doing okay." Paragould participants graded their schools at a B level, or "we are doing well." It should also be noted that, although Hamburg graded their schools as a C, they did distinguish between the Hamburg City schools and the county schools. Hamburg's schools are seen as more successful than the counties thanks in part to a school based free lunch and breakfast program.⁶ These "grades" are fairly consistent with the results of the NWTs question regarding the quality of education in Arkansas communities.⁷ Seventy percent of the telephone survey respondents rated the quality of education as average or good and only 14%

⁶ Hamburg gives free lunch and breakfast to all students enrolled in their public schools.

⁷ NWTs question six.

rated it as below average or poor. These results indicate that overall, Arkansans are happy with the school system.

However, the study circles did mention schools in their discussions. Three groups specifically discussed concerns about the education system. Hamburg felt that the school curriculum has become too structured and that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created many problems for the school system. Hamburg was also concerned about low math scores, particularly for black male students. One of the NWA circles wanted the schools to move to a business model, having year long classes and changing to a for-profit model. And the Hispanic circle in Mena was concerned because they felt that there were not equal opportunities for Hispanic students in area schools. This group was particularly concerned about the lack of scholarship money for Hispanic students to attend college.

The study circle participants also wanted to see several new subjects introduced into the curriculum. Four out of the five regions (all but NWA) were concerned over sex education. Most groups wanted to see more sex education taught in the schools; however, Mena's Hispanic circle felt that abstinence education should be stressed more. Paragould wanted to make child development and parenting a required course in high school. This concern over teenage sexuality is reflected in the NWTs data as well. Sixty-four percent of respondents felt that the level of teen pregnancy was a serious or moderate problem in their community.⁸ Other subjects the circles wanted added to the curriculum included financial education, health issues such as diet, exercise and personal hygiene, and English as a second language classes for students and adults. Paragould also mentioned adding relationship and communication classes to the curriculum.

⁸ NWTs question eleven. Thirty-two percent felt it was serious problem and 32% felt it was a moderate problem.

The groups also mentioned ways to improve the education system overall. Aside from improving the curriculum, one of the Hamburg circles wanted to meet with the school board to discuss problems that exist in their schools. Another group from Hamburg wanted a student representative who could voice students' concerns to the administration. Mena's Hispanic group felt that a return to corporeal punishment would improve the schools. Whatever their possible solutions, it is easy to see that all the study circles were concerned about the current education system in Arkansas and want to see it improved to better meet the needs of our children.

Employment

Next, the participants were asked to grade employment based on whether everyone in their community "has an equal opportunity for a good-paying job." The average grade for this category was a D, which means "we've had no success."⁹ No region gave this category higher than a C for "we are doing okay." Also, four out of five of the regions stated that their area was economically depressed in some way (Paragould did not mention this in their discussions and graded employment as a C). Mena stated that they needed more industry and felt that better highways would help with this problem. Hamburg's circles said that the only jobs available in their region were low paying or part time. Jacksonville felt that the community needed to offer better incentives for businesses to move in. Poverty was also an issue for three of the regions' circles. One of the NWA participants made the comment that although some of the wealthiest people in the state live in that region, there is a large gap between those individuals and everyone else. Mena and Paragould wanted to offer job skills training to help people find employment. Overall, the study circles were concerned about the lack of quality jobs for parents in their communities and how this contributes to poverty. This concern is reflected in the fact that five percent of the

⁹ Six of the participants stated that they were unsure.

NWTS participants felt that poverty was the biggest problem facing children and another four percent felt that it was the second biggest problem.¹⁰

Health Care

Next, the study circle participants were asked to grade their community's health care system by answering the question "our health care system serves the needs of all our residents." Although five of the participants said they were unsure (a grade of Q), the average grade for the health care system was a D (we've had no success). In fact, health care was one of the most frequently discussed topics in the study circles. Every study circle group stated that they felt all children needed health insurance. Two of the groups wanted to do this by increasing the ARKids First program to cover more kids, and at least one group suggested expanding the program to include college students.¹¹ Paragould felt that offering incentives to employers who offer health insurance was a good idea. Also, one of the NWA circles felt that the insurance industry needed to be reevaluated, particularly the reimbursement system. The NWTS results reflect this concern. In fact, health insurance was the number one response given by the respondents when asked what is the biggest problem facing Arkansas Children.¹²

The other two most often cited responses to Question one of the NWTS were lack of health care¹³ and the cost of health care¹⁴. Also, of the respondents who had children under 18 living with them, 38% said that they somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement "I can afford to get all

¹⁰ NWTS Question one.

¹¹ The Mena Hispanic circle and Hamburg wanted to increase funding to ARKids First. However, the Mena non-Hispanic circle commented that it was hard to get to the doctor because too many people had free insurance and went to the doctor too many times because of it.

¹² NWTS Question one. 29% of respondents felt that health insurance was the biggest problem, 6% felt that it was the second biggest.

¹³ 12% said it was the biggest problem, 7% said it was the second biggest problem.

¹⁴ 8% said it was the biggest problem, 5% said it was the second biggest.

the medical care, services, and medication my child or children need.”¹⁵ The study circle discussions also reflected these concerns. Four out of the five regions stated they had provider shortages in their areas. Mena and Jacksonville were concerned over the lack of facilities. Hamburg wanted to see more health and wellness centers in their area. As a possible solution to the provider shortage, one NWA circle proposed creating incentives, such as loan reimbursement to attract medical professionals to the area. Also, four out of five of the reports mentioned that they had access problems. These problems included the cost of health care, the convenience of doctor’s office hours, and the lack of public transportation to help working parents get to appointments. Another big access concern mentioned by the study circles was the lack of dental services offered to kids.¹⁶ Mena was more specific, stating that they lacked dentists who take ARKids First in their area. Two areas, Paragould and Hamburg, suggested a mobile dental unit to go around to the schools. Like the study circle participants, Twenty-three percent of NWTS respondents felt that there was not enough available dental care for children.¹⁷ The lack of dental care seems to be a growing concern in the state.

The study circle also discussed particular health and wellness problems that children face. Poor nutrition and poor diet were mentioned in all five of the study circle reports, as was some type of substance abuse problem (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or a combination of these things). While only two reports mentioned the problem of obesity, four stated that children today did not get enough physical activity. Some possible solutions for the problems of poor diet and exercise were to increase the number of community activities, have a fitness challenge in the school or community, hold health fairs, improve sidewalks so that people can walk to their destination and

¹⁵ NWTS Question twenty-five.

¹⁶ Four of the regions mentioned this problem, only Jacksonville did not.

¹⁷ NWTS Question three. Eight percent rated it below average, 15% rated it poor.

improve preventive care. Lack of prenatal care and the mental health of children were also mentioned in several of the circle's reports. Also, the Jacksonville and Mena circles mentioned car crashes among teenagers as a health and safety concern.¹⁸

These concerns over the health of children were shared by the NWTs respondent's. Statewide, 44% of respondents felt that obesity was a serious problem for our children.¹⁹ Thirty-three percent stated that it was a moderate problem. Also, about 24% of the respondents with children under 18 living in the house said that they strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement "I am concerned that my child or children might be overweight."²⁰ Drugs were also a concern for the NWTs respondents. Sixty-six percent felt that smoking by children was a moderate or serious problem²¹ and seventy-two percent said that alcohol and drug use by children was a moderate or serious problem in their community.²² And, the NWTs also rated mental illness among children in the respondents' communities. Thirty-seven percent felt that mental illness among children was a serious or moderate problem.²³

As both the NWTs and the study circle discussions reflect, the health and well-being of our children is one of the biggest concerns in Arkansas at this time. The study circles moved their discussion into ways that we could solve these problems. Aside from the few mentioned above, the most popular way to increase children's health and access to quality care was to provide school-based health services. Four of the study circle reports mentioned doing just this. NWA,

¹⁸ One study circle from Hamburg was concerned about the high rates of autism in their community. No other group mentioned this, and it was only mentioned once by this circle. Also, one study circle from Hamburg said that pollution from Georgia Pacific was a problem, but another circle said that the company was one of the biggest employers and a good thing to happen to the area. And, one of the NWA circles mentioned children with disabilities and ensuring they received services and support.

¹⁹ NWTs Question twelve.

²⁰ NWTs Question twenty-six.

²¹ NWTs Question fourteen.

²² NWTs Question sixteen.

²³ NWTs Question seventeen.

Paragould and Hamburg wanted to see medical and dental clinics at the schools and Mena wanted the school nurses to have better facilities. In fact, one dentist from the Hamburg area is committed to getting a portable dental chair that can be taken to the schools for dental screenings, fluoride treatments, and sealants to be given to the kids.²⁴ The NWTS respondents were also interested in bringing health services to schools. In fact, 61% of the respondents strongly agreed that primary health care should be provided in schools.²⁵ Another 18% somewhat agreed with this statement. Although the study circles and NWTS seem to have a somewhat grim view of the current state of our health care system and children's health overall, they seem willing to make changes to improve this. This indicates that many people in Arkansas are ready for a change in how we provide health care to children.

Leadership

The study circles were asked to grade leadership in their community next. This grade was to be based on whether or not the participants felt that their "community leaders reflect the diversity of our residents." This category did slightly better than most; earning an average grade of C (we're doing okay).²⁶ Leadership was mentioned in the discussion groups, but not as frequently as the other topics. Three of the groups stated that there was poor leadership, particularly that the leaders in the community did not reflect the diversity of the population. Mena's Hispanic group was especially concerned about this, as were the participants in NWA, where the Hispanic and Marshallese populations were of great concern. In fact, diversity was mentioned by the Mena and NWA Arkansas circles frequently.²⁷ Both groups felt that diversity was a goal for their

²⁴ Letter from Michael D. McDaniels, D.D.S. given to the Arkansas Study Circle Project.

²⁵ NWTS Question twenty-two.

²⁶ Three people were unsure of what to grade this, and two groups who only turned in one grade were also unsure.

²⁷ It should be noted that the two senior members of the Mena "non-Hispanic" group did not want to increase diversity, stating that factor was one of the reasons they chose to live in Mena.

communities, and both wanted to see better opportunities for immigrants made available.²⁸ Also, both NWA and Mena agreed on a possible solution to the poor leadership. This solution was to give each elected official a “report card” or to ensure they are accountable to their constituents for their actions. Mena’s Hispanic group also wanted to encourage the younger generation to vote. Both NWA and Mena saw accountability in leadership as a way to increase diversity in their communities.

Social Services

Social services was the next area that the study circles were asked to grade. The groups were asked to grade social services based on whether the system in their community met everyone’s needs. The social services system received an average grade of D (we’ve had no success).²⁹ In fact, this poor grade was not the only mention of social services. The topic of government assistance programs was one of the most frequently mentioned in the study circle reports. All five regions stated in their report that there were problems with assistance programs. One of the biggest problems mentioned was program abuse, NWA wanted more accountability in government programs and Mena felt that financial counseling should be required before you are allowed to enroll. Mena also wanted to see a screening program put in place before allowing people to get assistance. Also all five regions wanted to see better distribution of funds to resource programs and some assurance that those who are taking advantage of the services really need them. This data is consistent with the NWTS responses. Of all NWTS respondents in the

²⁸ NWA was very concerned over inequalities in the Healthcare system. Mena’s Hispanic circle was more concerned over the lack of opportunity for Hispanic students in the education system.

²⁹ Six were unsure.

state, 42% somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement that the state children services system worked well.³⁰

All five of the reports also mentioned that families in the community are not being educated about the resources that are available to them. Each of these groups wants the resources available through assistance programs actually getting into the communities. Also, all five reports felt that the way to address this problem was to create some sort of resource coordination. Some groups felt that a resource guide would be the best option; some felt a resource center and coordinator could be more beneficial, and one group even suggested a hotline to advise community members on what was available to meet their needs. Paragould even suggested using local law enforcement as a way to refer individuals to outside agencies when they need assistance.

As for how to improve the efficiency of the resources and make recipients more accountable for how they use them, the study circles were less enthusiastic about how to accomplish this goal. There was no consensus as there was in coordinating community resources to solve the problem of awareness. A few groups thought counseling families on how to navigate the “system” was a good solution. Paragould suggested offering transitional assistance to families coming out of government assistance programs. This group felt that might help decrease the number of people who return to government assistance programs. Jacksonville felt that the programs in their community were strong, but wanted to support those and find ways to improve them.³¹ Mena also thought that the programs available were “excellent” but that they were being underutilized by those who need them and abused by those who are using them.³² Hamburg wants to fund a

³⁰ NWTS Question 21.

³¹ Particularly wanted to support the local Police and Kids Together (PAKT) program, it was one of their action ideas and discussed again in the action forum they held after the conclusion of the study circles.

³² This theme was recurring throughout several areas study circle discussions. Many felt that services provided weren't necessarily the problem, but that they should be administered more efficiently and those who enroll should

revamping of the welfare system so that funds are distributed in a way that prevents abuse (i.e., paying the provider directly). Again, the problems with the current social services system were some of the most frequently mentioned concerns in the study circles' reports. Although the groups offered possible solutions, this topic deserves greater attention at a later date.

Media

The next area the study circle participants were asked to grade was the media in their community. The participants were asked to grade whether or not the “local radio, TV stations, and newspapers offer fair and full coverage about people from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.” The average grade for the media was once again a D (we’ve had no success). Mena was the only group to specifically mention the poor media coverage in their area. No one mentioned ideas for how to improve upon the media either. Though it seems all groups agree that the media coverage in their communities is lacking, none see this as a particularly pressing problem.

Criminal Justice

Study circle participants were asked to grade the extent to which “all members of the community are treated fairly by the criminal justice system.” The average grade for the criminal justice system in Arkansas was a D (we’ve had no success).³³ NWA, Mena’s Hispanic circle, and Hamburg all mentioned the problem of inequality in the criminal justice system.³⁴ It is not surprising that NWA and the Hispanic circle mentioned this problem, as they were also the groups most concerned with diversity in their communities and equal opportunities for immigrants. The

be held accountable for how they use the system, i.e.—shouldn’t be allowed to buy drugs with assistance funds while kids go hungry.

³³ Thirteen participants stated that they were unsure of what grade to give to the criminal justice system.

³⁴ Hamburg specifically stated that it was hard for the poor to find good counsel (I am assuming they were referring to legal counsel).

Mena Hispanic circle did suggest starting prison service programs so that criminals are helping the community in some way, however, this doesn't seem to be a suggestion geared toward improving equality in the criminal justice system. Criminal justice seems to be a lot like media—every group recognizes that there is a problem, but none seem very concerned with trying to fix it. It seems that the study circle participants feel that other problems in their community are more immediate and require more attention.

Several circles did mention problems with crime. Both NWA and Hamburg were concerned over safety and the amount of violence in their community. Mena stated that it had a problem with crime and vandalism in the community. Specific crimes mentioned included domestic abuse and sexual predation. Again no solutions were offered for these problems.

Three questions in the NWTS addressed the concern of violence and crime directed toward children. Respondents were asked how well their community did at providing a safe environment for children.³⁵ Eight percent of the respondent said their community did an excellent job. This isn't very many, but 46% said that their community did a good job. Also, respondents were asked how serious the problem of gun violence was in their community.³⁶ Thirty-three percent said that it was a serious or moderate problem. However, 43% of respondents from Southeast Arkansas said it was a serious or moderate problem.³⁷ And respondents were asked how serious the problem of physical and sexual child abuse was in their community. Thirty-eight percent of respondents stated that child abuse was a serious or moderate problem in their community.³⁸ The data from the NWTS matches the study circle reports in that most agree that crime is a problem in

³⁵ NWTS Question ten.

³⁶ NWTS Question eighteen.

³⁷ Southeast Arkansas is where Hamburg is located, and Hamburg's circles reported concerns over crime and violence in their neighborhoods.

³⁸ NWTS Question thirteen.

Arkansas communities, particularly crimes of violence toward children. However, this problem isn't the one that NWTs respondents or study circle participants were most concerned about.

Public Works

The last area to be graded was public works in the community. The community was graded based on whether or not all areas "have access to public services, such as water, trash pickup, and sidewalk and road maintenance. This area actually received a higher grade than most others, it averaged a C (we're doing okay).³⁹ Paragould and Jacksonville gave public works in their community a B (we're doing well). Overall, the area of public works didn't seem to be a very big concern for study circle participants.

Paragould and Jacksonville, despite their high marks, felt that their communities needed more public transportation. Jacksonville was especially concerned with providing transportation to services, such as doctors' appointments. Paragould and Mena also wanted to improve sidewalks in their community. Mena felt that a better highway system in southwest Arkansas would improve the economic situation in that region by allowing industry to develop. Also, Mena wanted to plant a community garden as a way to provide food at low cost for all citizens. Paragould offered a solution for how to fund such improvements. They suggested hiring a community grant writer to locate and apply for grants to benefit the community. Although the participants did not grade public works very low in their communities, they saw improving the functioning of public works as a way to address other problems in the community.

Family and Community

Although the topics of family and community were not graded in the session three report card, they were two of the most cited concerns among circle participants. In fact, all five reports

³⁹ Four participants were unsure of what grade to give public works.

mentioned the breakdown of the family structure as a big problem in their community and worried over the lack of parental responsibility and accountability.⁴⁰ Four of the groups mentioned that parents today lacked parenting skills.⁴¹ And Mena and Hamburg circles felt that family morals had broken down. But, the family wasn't the only source of concern. All but one group wanted to see the community become more involved in its children⁴² and three of five felt that churches should play a more important role in the community and family life.

The study circles were also asked to describe their vision for their communities, although each groups varied somewhat, some general themes emerged from these discussions. Most groups mentioned family or togetherness as something important to them.⁴³ Also, opportunity, diversity, education and health were mentioned by most of the groups. Most of the visions reflected the groups concerns for better health care for all children; equal opportunities for all citizens despite race, ethnicity, or social class; more accountability in the social services systems; a fairer distribution of resources; and strengthening families in their community.

One possible solution for meeting the goal of stronger families and communities was to get local churches to collaborate with organizations to create after school programs and provide transportation to and from these activities. In fact three reports mentioned more church involvement in the lives of community members and particularly families.⁴⁴ Every report but the one from NWA mentioned the problem of poor parenting skills. To solve this problem, many

⁴⁰ Problems mentioned included the lack family "together time," both parents working, single parent households, and grandparents raising grandchildren.

⁴¹ None of the NWA circles mentioned this as a concern. Also, Jacksonville was particularly concerned about developing parenting skills in teen moms.

⁴² None of the Hamburg circles mentioned this as a concern or a hope. The Mena circle felt that community was like a family and NWA reported that the community should be strengthened.

⁴³ Three groups used the word family, one Hamburg group wanted parent involvement and accountability.

⁴⁴ Paragould, Mena, and Jacksonville all wanted to see more church involvement. Mena wanted churches to take care of their members, and Jacksonville wanted families to become more involved in local churches. Paragould proposed the after school activities in the church.

suggested parenting classes offered in the community. Paragould even wanted to see parenting and child development taught in high school.

Also, NWA, Mena, and Hamburg all mentioned the problem of media and T.V. being a negative influence on children. Paragould and Mena also stated there was a lack of good role models for children in the community, and Paragould even wanted to create a mentor program. As you can see from the above results, most Arkansas communities feel that family, community, and faith are important components of children's health and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Two of the biggest concerns for the study circle participants were that their ideas would not be heard and that the time they had spent in these discussions would be wasted. Mena, Paragould and Hamburg mentioned using study circles again as a way to focus on community specific issues. NWA wanted to collect data on children to identify concerns in their community. Several study circles expressed concern over what would happen after the study circle discussions took place. They wanted to ensure that their opinions were validated and something came out of the time they spent participating. Many groups have actually moved into action as a result of the study circles. Jacksonville has had the recommended follow-up meeting, NWA groups have begun working with the Hometown Health Coalition to move forward with their action ideas, and Paragould has even formed the Interagency Coalition discussed in their last session. And the Natural Wonders Partnership Initiative is moving forward as well. The data from these circles will be combined with other collected data to formulate a 10 year plan for improving children's health in Arkansas.