

Community Connectedness and Social Cohesion

Spenard Creative Weaving Tool

Prepared by Lindsey Hajduk, NeighborWorks Alaska

Project Background

On Thursday, June 23, 2022, the former Spenard Community Council (SCC) Executive Board met for this reflection process. The group served as the planning and selection committee for the Stories of Spenard creative community development project. Stories of Fish Creek brought together storytelling, arts, and culture to the Spenard neighborhood's iconic Fish Creek Trail through interpretive signs.

In 2021, NeighborWorks Alaska (NWAK) partnered with the SCC, Anchorage Parks and Recreation, and Anchorage Park Foundation on this project. This initiative created and installed six culturally relevant interpretive signs along the Fish Creek Trail. The Dena'ina name for Fish Creek is "**Ch'atanaltsegh**," meaning yellow water comes out. A goal of this project is to bring local stories and art into a creative place-making project along the Fish Creek Trail. NWAK partnered with Anchorage Parks & Recreation, Anchorage Parks Foundation, and Spenard Community through the funding support of AARP (\$10,000) and NeighborWorks America / Kresge Foundation (\$5,000).

In Spenard, residents recently worked to rehabilitate its local greenbelt trail along Fish Creek. The trail connects to schools, a recreation center, six neighborhood parks, and many residential streets. In 2019, the community celebrated the new trail surfacing, bridge upgrades, and added lighting. Since then, trail use doubled: in April-May 2017 Fish Creek trail averaged 700 daily users, compared to 1,450 daily users in April-May 2020!

Residents wanted to build on the success of the rehabilitation of Fish Creek Trail by integrating local culture and storytelling along the way. The project was completed in Fall 2021; however due to supply chain delays and frozen ground over winter, the signs are set to be installed in Summer 2022. The installation is dependent on understaffed Anchorage Parks & Recreation staff to complete the installation.

Community Connectedness and Social Cohesion Evaluation Tool

The Stories of Fish Creek project is part of NeighborWorks America's Creative Community Development evaluation cohort in 2022. The SCC Executive Board members who served on the selection committee for Stories of Fish Creek were invited to participate in the "Community Connectedness and Social Cohesion" evaluation tool (weaving tool) on June 23, 2022. The weaving tool is designed to evaluate outcomes from arts and creative strategies used to build community connectedness and social cohesion. The tool uses a circle weaving activity completed in a group setting to measure key components of community connectedness.

The participants included 6 members of the selection committee, though two people could not join due to prior engagements.

Self-Portraits

- Participant 1: Shared her self-portrait “kind of looks like a little kid.”
- Participant 2: Shared the self-portrait on the back, simply as a picture of Bob.
- Participant 3: Shared how she looks, put her hat on because she wears hats a lot, always in the garden talking with neighbors. Included words: Community Activist, Gardener, Wife, Sister, Friend.
- Participant 4: Included her smiling a lot and curly hair. Included words: Laughter, Community, Eccentric, Diversity. That’s how she sees Spenard too. “I fit into Spenard because it is so eccentric. I fit into the eccentricity.”
- Participant 5: Appreciates hearing the shared feelings of how we all feel connected. Shared a self-portrait included: Advocate, Change Maker, Friend, Partner, Community Member. And curly hair and a big (quiet) loud mouth.
- Participant 6: Shared her self-portrait and loved seeing everyone else’s shared too.

Discussion Questions

Dimension	Questions to guide the weaving	Yarn/ribbon color
Connectedness	• Overall, how connected do you feel to other people in your community?	Orange Yarn
	• How connected do you feel to other individuals or groups in the community who are not like you in some way? (Race, ethnicity, age, gender orientation, disability, etc.)	Orange Sparkle Ribbon
	• To what extent did the creative community project help you better understand people or groups of people who are different from you?	Blue-Green Yarn
Belonging	How much do you feel that you have a voice in decisions that are made in your community that affect you?	Rainbow Ribbon
Attachment to Community	How much do you feel that this community is a special place to live?	Yellow Yarn
Disconnectedness	How much do you feel disconnected from people or groups in your community?	Red or Blue Velvet Ribbon



Connectedness

Overall, how connected do you feel to other people in your community?

- 1: Tried to make this a heart-shape, surrounding the entire weave instead of beginning in the middle. It doesn't always keep it's form though, representing how I can always be more connected.
- 2: Overall, created the loom as an abstract person with two eyes as bells and sort of dreadlocks with the yarn and ribbons. "A place is kind of like a person." These ideas are as interconnected and hopefully become a whole. The "head" is the orange yarn for connectedness, as the foundation for the person. This is created as a work in progress, a community as a person.
- 3: Overall, everything is woven because everything that I feel is woven through life and the community. "I have a lot of orange in there because I feel a lot of connectedness to the community." I like the orange because it's soft and tactile, like flowers and yarns. "I feel such a strong connection to the community."
- 4: Feels like she fits into Alaska in this tight little knot in the middle of the weaving. She's been in Spenard "forever." It was the first place she lived with her own apartment. Had previously lived downtown and Bootlegger's Cove with roommates from the newspaper, and Government Hill. Had lived a few places in Spenard and made her way back. "I just feel Spenard. I feel Spenardy. It's me. I like it for a lot of reasons."
- 5: Started with a tight orange knot at the center, reflecting themes we've all shared about being connected.
- 6: Did tight orange in the center because we're connected. Included a penguin in the center because house is near Penguin Street (near the abandoned car that's been there for 2 weeks).

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong connection to community and its people • Connection to Spenard 	<p>"I feel such a strong connection to the community."</p> <p>I just feel Spenard. I feel Spenardy. It's me. I like it for a lot of reasons."</p>

How connected do you feel to other individuals or groups in the community who are not like you in some way? (Race, ethnicity, age, gender orientation, disability, etc.)

- 1: Made this more sculptural in the center with knots, acting like a target or a goal of connecting with people different than with me. Then the ribbon created sparkles all around the loom. "It's a goal, something I can work harder on."
- 4: These are people that are coming into our community and moving to other parts in the community, signified in the ribbon going throughout the weaving. It's people going throughout the community, including into the (orange/connectedness) knot where she feels connected to others coming into the heart of our community. "I love the people that live here because we're such a unique breed. People talk about us. They don't like us. They have weird feelings about us. But us that live here, we know what this is. We have this special thing."
- 5: The ribbon signifies some of the groups as she's not as similar as in different ways, but they have just as much value, sparkle, and shine. She tied little bows in the ribbon to signify opportunities to learn from others and to find ways to bring them in more to the community and the council, to find more ways to share, give them a voice, and learn from them.
- 6: Put this ribbon on the side because "I don't feel like I connect enough with people that are different than me in many ways." For example, knows a lot of women, but not a lot of men or people her age (younger), and that's something to work on. The ribbons are moveable so they can change and aren't static in place.

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge there are many diverse groups in Spenard • Opportunities to connect with other groups 	<p>"I don't feel like I connect enough with people that are different than me in many ways."</p> <p>"I love the people that live here because we're such a unique breed. People talk about us. They don't like us. They have weird feelings about us. But us that live here, we know what this is. We have this special thing."</p>

To what extent did the creative community project help you better understand people or groups of people who are different from you?

- 1: It shows how I understand people part of the way, but can always do more. Ribbon is representing this by tying one line across the loom.
- 3: Interwove this and the "attachment" color yarns together, signifying her love of the neighborhood and place.

- 4: This signifies how much she feels connected and knows each other in a knot because we choose to live here. “I don’t feel like we’re here by accident. I feel like we make a choice. When I got my house in Spenard, my friends ask OMG why don’t you live in South Anchorage, and I asked why would I?”
- 5: Thinking about Stories of Spenard and other projects we can do, added little knots as anchors as ways to bring us together and around projects so that we can continue to cultivate what it means to live in Spenard.
- 6: The orange is tight in the center, then the rest of these are external out from there. “The art and creativity in the community is something I feel all around myself. I feel like especially with the community council my voice has been amplified so it’s a lot bigger.”

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of neighborhood • Cultivate what it means to live in Spenard • Connection through community council 	<p>“I don’t feel like we’re here by accident. I feel like we make a choice.”</p> <p>“The art and creativity in the community is something I feel all around myself.”</p>

Belonging

How much do you feel that you have a voice in decisions that are made in your community that affect you?

- 1: Similarly to understanding other groups, I do part of the way but could be more. The ribbon is representing this by tying one line across the loom.
- 3: “I do feel that I have a choice and a voice in the community, and I really love that.” The bells are like the bell tolling, “wake up people so that we can get our voices out, other people’s voices out.”
- 4: “I just feel like I belong.” “Joining the SCC has given me a voice, and through that my voice has been stronger” The bells signify her screaming, and how to make her voice even stronger.
- 5: “I feel like I belong and can make a difference, and those two pieces are important to me. It’s about how much you can invest in a place, and how much you can change and improve and learn from a place.”
- 6: Tried to make this yarn in a circle because the community is a special place and sits on everything else that she feels.

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging through community council • Strong sense of belonging • Ability to make a difference 	<p>“I do feel that I have a choice and a voice in the community, and I really love that.”</p> <p>“I just feel like I belong.”</p> <p>“I feel like I belong and can make a difference, and those two pieces are important to me.”</p>

Attachment to Community

How much do you feel that this community is a special place to live?

- 1: Tried to do another heart as a target around the loom again.
- 3: The orange is the overriding color because “we have a unique, beautiful community and I feel lucky to be part of it. Spenard Rocks and is the best place to live and I would never live outside of Spenard, I just can’t even imagine.”
- 4: Spenard isn’t like other places where there are HOA’s or covenants telling you what to do. “We do what we want, whether it’s good or bad.” “I can’t imagine living anywhere else.” She cannot explain how much it’s so special. “I love this place and I’ve been meeting new neighbors. I watch the kids on my block grow up. They’re just so awesome. I am Spenard.”
- 5: Added more orange yarn to this to show how “we’re such a funky and creative place and there’s a lot of identity around. Not a lot of neighborhoods in Anchorage have an identity around them, but in Spenard we do.” The yarn has fun with that.

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can’t imagine living anywhere else• Positive neighborhood identity• Strong neighborhood pride	<p>“I can’t imagine living anywhere else.”</p> <p>“We have a unique, beautiful community and I feel lucky to be part of it.”</p> <p>“Spenard Rocks and is the best place to live and I would never live outside of Spenard, I just can’t even imagine.”</p> <p>“We’re such a funky and creative place and there’s a lot of identity around.”</p>

Disconnectedness

How much do you feel disconnected from people or groups in your community?

- 1: “This is something to be mindful of, but that I don’t feel very much right now.” Tied this as a knot as a reminder to keep this in mind.
- 2: These parts are not as connected as they should be, including the disconnectedness red yarn.
- 3: Didn’t use this yarn. Though she may feel this at times, it’s not how she overall feels about the community.
- 5: There are so many different communities in Spenard, so they surround the weaving as opportunities with knots and anchors. “So that we’re not always disconnected but have opportunities to connect.”

- 6: Doesn't feel disconnected from the community, but sometimes from different groups like those that have different political groups. The ribbon is again moveable since it can change over time.

Themes	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not critical need • Lack of using this yarn, lack of belief in disconnection 	<p>"This is something to be mindful of, but that I don't feel very much right now."</p> <p>"So that we're not always disconnected but have opportunities to connect."</p>

Debrief

The group was glad to reflect using this creative process. They shared more about how they've watched neighbor's children grow up, learn from their cultures (Hmong), share food and vegetables to try and learn, visit different neighborhood markets, and more.

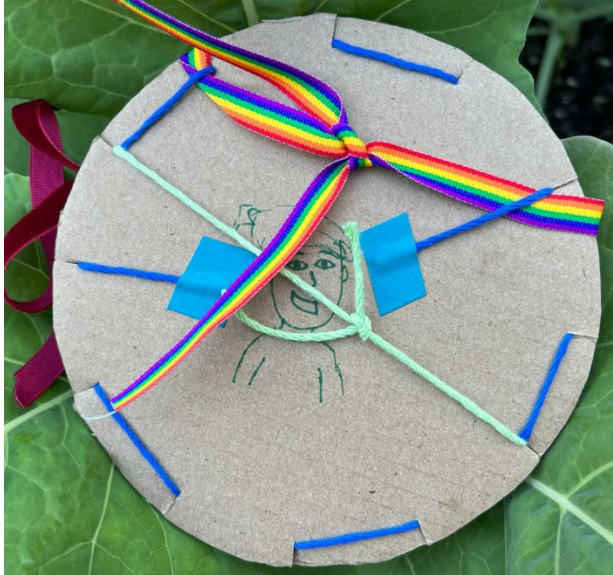
The group found this discussion to be a reflection on how to be the "best stewards of our community." They shared it was a fun and one of the most interesting ways to get the group to think outside of the box.

Some of the next steps include having the new SCC executive board meet (which includes many of these same members), and to plan out the process for coming creative community development projects for the coming year, building on what is learned from these surveys.

As a facilitator, I could have shared more prompts, including the self-portrait, and encouraged more "found objects." Instead, the group used more of the materials shared to the group.

Portraits and Weavings

Participant #1



Participant #2



Participant #3



Participant #4



Participant #5



Participant #6

