An Enhance the personal and organizational skills of the youth
recreational alternatives
Give youth the same sense of ownership over the recovery process
• Public
Tree
Laptop
Educational
Surveys of student leaders who organized this exhibit reported that the activity and art
"Where were you the day...". Graffiti wall of youth and by youth, Winds of Change
• A Voice for Holt
• Three days of voting by high school and middle
school students indicated that a vast majority of the youth preferred incorporation over association
for Holt (see figure right). The youth’s clear preference suggests that they recognize the
dependence of community rebuilding and development on Holt’s future. However, surveyed students
indicated that it would be best if student art could be showcased outside the school in the
broader community.

Winds of Change: Youth Perspectives on Community Recovery

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Theoretical Foundation
This student-led project drew upon the theoretical framework of positive
youth development, as outlined by Lerner (2004) and others. The positive
youth perspective shifts the focus of research and policy from why youth fail
to how they succeed and thrive. Within this framework, teens thrive when they
have a context that supports their abilities and opportunities to engage productively and positively with their communities. In turn, teens who are
thriving engage voluntarily in behaviors that serve the needs of themselves
and others in adaptive ways.
Community service represents a developmental opportunity, particularly for at-risk youth at the transition to adulthood. Through meaningful community
service and activism, teens can:
• Build positive social networks
• Clarify their values and find a direction
• Develop social competence
• Develop a sense that they can make significant
contributions to their peers and their broader community and society

Objectives and Overview
Winds of Change was a series of youth-led discussions and educational
exhibits addressing the experience of the April 27th, 2011 tornado and the
recovery priorities for the Holt community and its neighbors. As an event
for youth and by youth, Winds of Change was designed to add the missing youth
perspective to discourses regarding community recovery. Among the topics
addressed were:
• commercial and economic needs of the Holt community
• youth-oriented employment and work training needs
• community history and vision for future
• recreational alternatives
• public transportation and infrastructure
• community representation and governance
There were also videos, art, and photographs of Holt by youth related to
tornadoes and their community.
All exhibits were created by and hosted by high school and middle school
School students with mentoring by UA undergraduate psychology students
under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey G. Parker
Goals
• Adding the missing youth perspective and voice to the process of
community recovery following the April 27th tornadoes
• Give youth the same sense of ownership over the recovery process
that adult community members had been enjoying
• Enhance the personal and organizational skills of the youth
• Foster youth’s spirit of community engagement and sense of civic
responsibility
• Enhance the broader positive profile of Holt High School, the
community, and youth as citizens

Interactive Youth Exhibits
Say it Loud, Say it Proud
Cultivate the voices and vision of Holt youth and their unique perspective on their
community
Activities included:
• A voice booth in which youth record their impressions of their community and what it
means to them.
• Community school youth art and stories celebrating lives and community
• A “Simple Twist of Fate.” Art installation of tornado debris with a living tree
commemorating community members lost to the tornado.

Back to the Future
Provided a portrait of the community and Holt High School.
Activities included:
• A walk timeline of Holt history from its founding to the present
• Facts and images of the April 27th tornado
• A community profile and demographics
• Past or Future? An interactive exhibit which examined purported historical documents and images
related to the community and high school and sent the youth from the myths and fabrications.

Parks and “Wreckreation”
Explored the youth’s vision for post-tornado recreational opportunities.
The exhibits included:
• An educational exhibit on near-by Hurricane Creek Nature Preserve including the
damage it suffered during the tornado
• Educational material on the health and other benefits of parks and other forms of
community recreation for youth and others
• Picturing the locations and styles of parks and recreation areas surrounding communities
• Tree of Hope. A tree salvaged from the tornado debris in which youth pinned their ideas for
recreational opportunities for the community
• A photo collage of the two local parks in the Holt area and their current conditions
• An interactive map that permitted the youth to express their vision of what the future
outlooks for these parks and where they would prefer to locate them in their community

All Up in Our Business
Focussed on the youth’s view of the community’s commercial priorities.
Activities included:
• Educational exhibits on the pros and cons of incorporating a city versus annexation by
 neighboring Tuscaloosa
• Educational material on the forms of governance in other familiar communities, including the school’s sports
teams versus those at the state level
• An educational exhibit on the pending highway bypass that will bisect the community
• An interactive map in which youth considered proposed possible by-pass boundaries
• Vowing booths and bulletin boards that permitted the youth to engage in a more vocal concerning whether they favor
incorporation as a city or annexation by Tuscaloosa

A Voice for Holt
Explores issues of community governance and leadership.
The exhibit included:
• Educational exhibits on the pros and cons of incorporating a city versus annexation by neighboring Tuscaloosa
• Educational material on the forms of governance in other familiar communities, including the school’s sports
teams versus those at the state level
• An educational exhibit on the pending highway bypass that will bisect the community
• An interactive map in which youth considered proposed possible by-pass boundaries

Winds of Change Event was held at Holt High School on the 18th – 20th of
April 2012. There was a Community Open House the evening of April 19th
Program
The event included a set of youth-led discussions, surveys, and educational
exhibits. Exhibits were youth-focused and interactive. All activities took
place in the auditorium of Holt High School. Participants were students of Holt
High School and Davis Emerson Middle School. Over three days, approximately 500 students and 100 community members—including many local
and school officials—participated.

Results
Formal and informal surveys as well as the student’s behavior and choices to the
interactive exhibits were used to ascertain the students’ perspectives on their
community’s recovery priorities and to draw a final report distributed to county
citizens. These results are summarized as follows:

Say it Loud, Say it Proud
• Surveys of student leaders who organized this exhibit reported that the activity and art
were perceived as positive and had increased interest in them and the voters. The results
generated that giving the students the opportunity to express themselves following the
tragedy and to do so in the future. However, surveyed students
indicated that it would be best if student art could be showcased outside the school in the
broader community.

Going Our Way?
• One of the student emails sent to the county commissioners advocated for increased public
transportation. Analysis of the geographical placement of bus stops on the interactive map of
the geographic footprint of the tornado showed that the youth’s school district and location
for economic expansion would be focused in the Peterson area of Tuscaloosa. The youth
suggested that community leaders consider fully accommodating Holt residents.

Back to the Future
• Results indicate that the youth did not have much depth in their knowledge of their
community’s history. The youth embraced the historical exhibit enthusiastically and appeared to acquire a new understanding of their community’s past. They also had
strong opinions and clear vision of what their community meant to them.

Going Our Way?
• The clearest request for recreation focused on water features including a water park, a
swimming pool, a pool, or a fountain (see figure right). After this, students requested
building an experience such as water slides, and merry-go-rounds. The third most requested was outdoor events such as football, baseball, and soccer fields.

Parks and “Wreckreation”
• Surveys of the students indicated that most students were interested in the college
buildings and by the new buildings that exist at Holt High School. They were also
very interested in part-time work, but most were unemployed. Results also suggest that
assisting youth in finding satisfying part-time employment can strengthen their ties
to the community while simultaneously beneficial for Holt’s economy.

The 2012 Holt High School senior class had the most students going to college than any other year. The
students involved in “Winds of Change” wrote about the event in their college applications, and
one student won a scholarship based on their paper about their development with this exhibit.

Reference

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