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PhillyRising effort comes to SW Phila.

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Carol Bangura, who runs an after-school program at Elmwood's Connell Park Center, doesn't like to walk through the park after dark.

"At 5 o'clock, I'm running out of here, because I'm scared," Bangura said at a meeting kicking off the city's PhillyRising collaborative initiative in the Southwest Philadelphia neighborhood Wednesday night.

If the collaborative gets results similar to those it claims to have achieved in other neighborhoods - including what it says is a 16 percent drop in crime in North Philly's Hartranft section - Bangura won't have to worry so much about her safety in the future.

"We're committed to making sure you guys are empowered," city Managing Director Rich Negrin told about 35 residents at the meeting.

"The city doesn't have all the answers. We know you guys know the problems in the community better than anybody else."


As with the other eight neighborhoods in which the collaborative has worked - including Point Breeze, Kensington and Strawberry Mansion - city officials let residents do the talking.

Bangura and other residents expressed concerns about literacy, language barriers within the diverse community and the lack of access to the Internet and computers.

"They are stripping our youth that need to be educated," said Curtis Singleton, who runs an after-school program focused on literacy. "Children in this community are not given a fair chance."

As a handful of residents voiced concerns, officials jotted them down on a poster. From there, neighbors were encouraged to attend another meeting in two weeks, at which they'll begin to work with officials on "action plans" to start making changes.

"The idea behind it is, instead of doing things for people, we're trying to do things with them and teach them," said

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PhillyRising Director John Farrell.

"In the process, we try to teach folks in the community so they get that capacity."

Negrin said that compared with other PhillyRising neighborhoods, the residents of Elmwood seemed to be ahead of the curve in articulating their needs to officials.

"These people are ahead, asking for computer labs. That comes later, usually," he said. "They often focus on blight and safety early."

Although he was surprised not to hear more about issues related to crime at Wednesday night's kickoff, Negrin said that in every PhillyRising neighborhood he's heard a different set of concerns.

"It gives credibility to our approach," he said.

"It's interesting to hear how different neighborhoods in the city have different problems."

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