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Along a River in the Wilds: a Podcast

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Along a River in the Wilds: a Podcast

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(*) Indicates primary advisor

(**) Indicates another student who is also declaring the same project as primary for SI (if applicable)

Introduction:

The American urban-rural divide has been further magnified by discourse surrounding the 2016 election. Through this project we aimed to uncover stories of people from three small towns in rural north central Pennsylvania who are identifying and overcoming challenges by harnessing their region's strengths in order to improve local social, economic, educational, and health outcomes.

Methods:

Interviews were recorded with 10 local change-makers. Core topics included Community Initiatives, Education, and Healthcare, within the communities of Lock Haven, Jersey Shore, and Renovo. Edited podcast episodes are released under "Along a River in the Wilds," available on major platforms including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and more. Show updates are posted on Facebook and Instagram to increase local reach, provide a space for commenting, and enable content sharing by the audience.

Results:

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Interviews identified the need for clear communication between local groups to synchronize efforts and pool resources. Additionally, recruiting individuals with specialized skill sets is difficult and requires community innovation to improve available services and activities to attract newcomers to the region. Furthermore, identifying and securing funding through grants and local government has been a limiting factor for many groups, impeding their ability to initiate, continue, or complete projects. Despite these challenges, guests likewise shared their established pathways to success and numerous projects that have improved local life.

Discussion:

Community vitality impacts the health of individual members, with research showing the effects of social connections, educational attainment, and lifetime income upon longevity and burden of disease. Local civic programs, job opportunities, educational systems, and healthcare access contribute to vitality, and require visibility in order to maximize collaboration and utilization of existing programs. Through this podcast we have provided a platform for sharing local stories and connecting individuals, while demonstrating how other small towns may assess their particular challenges and strengths to effect change.