

FLORIDA

IMMOKALEE

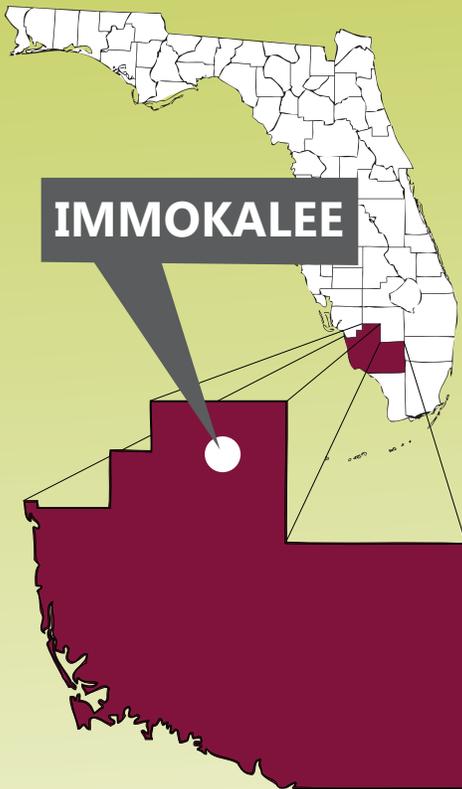
Population: 24,154

Estimated median household income: \$26,399

Estimated individuals below poverty level: 41.6%

Study Circles: 5

Study Circle Participants: 100



"Tide shows what the power of people getting together could do."

— Tide Committee Member

Note: Statistics from www.census.gov Quick Facts.

Turning the Tide on Poverty

Creating Vibrant Communities Together

In a town rooted in agriculture, Immokalee, Florida, turned the tide on poverty when people joined forces, working together toward a common goal.

More residents became willing and eager to give back to their community as a result of the process. When they learned how to better communicate their needs, a positive communication flow arose. These residents, many of whom spoke Spanish as their first language, felt heard and began to see results. In turn, they became more involved. This cycle was the first step in creating a unified community that worked together to accomplish their goals.

Effective Leadership

One of the strengths of Tide is that local volunteers are trained to facilitate the discussions. From these volunteers emerged new leaders in the community. These leaders gained a better understanding of each other and fellow participants when people learned to voice their opinions, becoming more transparent with one another. This was most notable because of the great language barrier between formal leaders and primarily Spanish-speaking residents. Translated materials as well as translators present at community circles made effective communication possible.

Community Partnerships

Creative and innovative thinking was on the rise as people began to network with leaders across the town. One initiative focused on youth empowerment. Not only did youth become more involved in the community, but also adults began to see the value of having these youth, the next generation, involved in improving the community.

Participants learned the process of project development and implemented better collaboration among organizations throughout the region. Multiple partners

started working together in a joint effort. This resulted in less duplication of service and increased cross-referrals to better serve individual and family needs, resulting in a much more efficient economic environment.

Town Improvements

With communication established, Tide teams tackled common concerns, one of which was safety. As many residents are without vehicles, safe walking paths are important. So, new street lights and sidewalks were installed to provide families a safer place to walk, especially on the pathway to schools.

Also, better transportation was made possible through public buses. This made it easier for the entire community to get around, especially the elderly and low-income residents.

Neighborhood Beautification

Participants led a neighborhood clean-up to enhance the community's natural beauty. This made the community safer by eliminating unsightly clutter which blocked walkways. The project provided participants with a greater sense of pride in their community. New community gardens also contributed to the natural beauty and created stronger unity among residents.

The Biggest "Win"

Participants are in agreement that their biggest "win" was finding their voice as individuals, communicating honestly and openly. With so many first generation United States' residents, many were unsure how to work and talk to solve community problems in this new culture. The Hispanic residents wanted to be involved and feel heard. When that happened, increased communication ultimately led to solving many of the community concerns.

The key to success in Immokalee was realizing that everyone already wanted

the same things in the community. They all wanted a safe and beautiful city where everyone felt welcomed and appreciated.

Through extensive collaboration, Immokalee made considerable strides toward reaching that goal that was once so out of reach. Immokalee has become a much more open community that appreciates the diversity their town presents. It all comes down to working together despite obstacles like a language barrier because ultimately,

according to the Tide participants, "We are all people with the same goals."

The Next Chapter

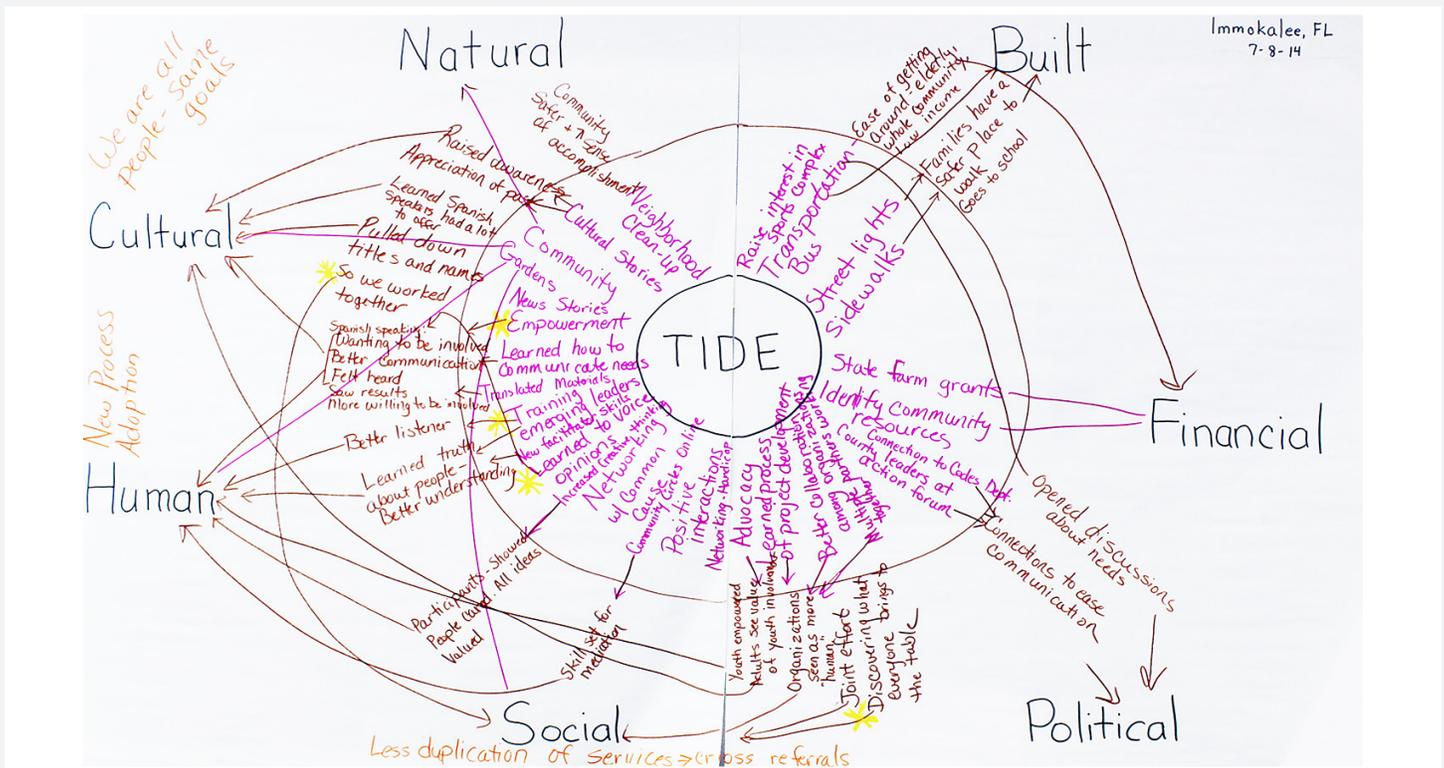
Because the Tide action teams experienced such great success in their efforts, they are now looking to repeat the process, focusing a great deal on building more community gardens in order to increase the availability of fruits and vegetables for healthier diets. Another focus of their efforts will be an Earth Day program that allows residents to meet

and get acquainted with their neighbors. Additionally a focus on rehabilitating housing in distressed neighborhoods is planned.

High school students have joined in the effort, taking an interest in advancing their community. They have been involved in much of the background research to make these visions a reality. Leaders are emerging in Immokalee through Tide, leaders for the next generation.

What is Turning the Tide on Poverty?

Turning the Tide on Poverty is a community circles initiative that has been taking shape across the South for the last five years. The program seeks to involve a wide range of community members in seeking a solution to poverty that is grounded in local talents and concerns and led by local voices engaging in thoughtful discussion and exploration. Participants gather for five sessions and work in study circles of 10 to 15 people. Through much collaboration, each group proposes three possible action ideas to address concerns in the community. All ideas are then considered in an Action Forum where participants finalize their community action plan.



What is Ripple Mapping?

Ripple Mapping, based on the concept of ripples in a pond, is used to explore Tide's impacts. This process uses community participants' collective memories to map the steps the community has made through their civic engagement process. The first circle contains steps or actions that the community made. The next circle indicates who benefitted and how they benefitted from those actions. These effects are then linked to big level changes, the seven community capitals: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built. Lastly, the biggest "wins" in each community are noted and identified with a yellow star.