

Research Paper #7: El Camino Neighborhood Snapshot (12/21/2023)



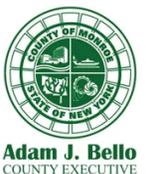
A mural along the El Camino trail.



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onthegroundny.com/about

The El Camino neighborhood is one of Northeast Rochester's longest standing communities. El Camino is Spanish for "The Way." The area's nickname is inspired by the nearby El Camino trail. Today, the surrounding neighborhood is mainly Puerto Rican. However, that has not always been the case. Over the past few decades, Irish, Germans, Italians, and Jewish communities have once settled there. This paper serves to investigate the culture of El Camino today, its demographics, assets, and challenges. This is a series of three research papers highlighting the three quadrants that the Neighborhood Collaborative Project (NCP) is focused on bringing services back to these neighborhoods. On the Ground Research staff interviewed the service coordinator at Father Tracy Advocacy Center and long-time resident of the El Camino area, Luis Lespier, who provided valuable insight on the many aspects of this community.



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Demographics

Today, the community is primarily composed of Puerto Rican and Black residents. According to Luis, the population used to be mostly African-American until Latinos started immigrating in the 1960s. This demographic shift only increased following Hurricane Maria and other natural disasters. According to census data from 2021, the area consists of 40% African-Americans and 28% Latinos. Because of the high immigrant population, around 30% of the population does not speak English, with Spanish being the primary other language. In addition, the median age of the community is 37 years old. El Camino has a high disability population, as around 30% of people have a disability. It is also important to note that El Camino is a medically underserved community (many people are unable to access needed medical services), which historically negatively impacts its large population of people with disabilities. Overall, El Camino has a unique composition of residents allowing it to develop a unique culture and community.



The map above shows the outline of what the Neighborhood Collaborative Project has identified as the Northeast NCP impact area. The neighborhood described in this paper, the El Camino Neighborhood, falls within these boundaries.

Income

In the El Camino neighborhood, 41% of the residents are living in poverty, which is over 3.5 times the national average. (All unlinked data is from PolicyMap database.) While discussing this issue, Luis expressed:

"It's so much that you see here, sometimes my eyes go watery."

There are numerous reasons for the high poverty rate, such as extreme wealth inequality, an overburdened education system, and persisting poverty resulting in a complex web of inequality within the community. In addition, the average median household income is less than half of the US average, sitting around \$32,600. Further, the upward mobility rate for this neighborhood is extremely low, between 1-3%. Upward mobility is the rate that individuals are able to move to a higher social or economic position. To compare, the upward mobility rate for Monroe County is 16%. This highlights how difficult it is for residents to get to the top 20th percentile for income. Overall, the economic side of El Camino is struggling, with a large portion of its population in poverty, low home values, and a high rate of vacant lots in the area. All of these factors, including others discussed in this paper, result in an ecosystem that can be difficult to navigate for the residents of El Camino.

Education/Employment

Young people who live in the El Camino neighborhood are primarily enrolled in the public school system, Rochester City School District (RCSD). Local schools include Henry Lomb School Elementary or Dr Martin Luther King Jr Elementary. Both of these schools are comprised of 97% economically disadvantaged students. In addition, less than 20% of students at both schools are proficient in math and reading, which is 30% lower than the state average. Overall, 62% of El Camino residents are high school graduates. The majority of El Camino residents are employed, but there is a wide variety in unemployment rates block by block. Some are as low as 0% while others reach as high as 38% in unemployment. One factor that may contribute to these issues with employment, alongside other challenges in the community, is the low internet access rates and percent of households having any type of computer. In both categories El Camino has some of the worst rates in all of Monroe, with 26% of individuals having no access to the internet, and 23% of households without a computer. This can negatively impact one's education and job opportunities. When it comes to careers, El Camino has diverse job types within the community. The most common jobs fall under health care and social assistance, with 22% of the community having this career. However, the least common job in the community is finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing occupations, with only 1% of the neighborhood working in this field. The rest of the sectors are well represented such as retail (14%), sales and office (17%) and manufacturing (11%). El Camino is unique compared to some of the other NCP neighborhoods, as most have extremely low numbers of people in the management, science and arts occupations, while the northeast has about 16% of community members in these industries.

Crime

Crime is relatively high in the El Camino Neighborhood. As reported by the RPDs Crime reports, in the past seven years, the crime that is the most committed in El Camino is larceny. This is the theft of personal property from another person or business. In 2022, larceny made up 56% of crimes alone. There was also a rise of murders in the neighborhood in recent years, rising from an average of zero to two, to eight in 2022. When commenting on how the neighborhood has changed over the years, Luis noted:

"It's a big percentage of young people that are dying by violence, especially gun, shooting, and crime."

In addition to the violence within the neighborhood, the community also struggles with an open air drug market. Within the community there has been a historically high number of overdoses and non-marijuana drug arrests in comparison to the rest of Monroe County. Overall, most of the crimes do not follow any patterns nor stay in any one area except the drug market which is concentrated in the neighborhood on North Clinton Avenue. Luis expanded on this during the interview by saying:

"There is a big percentage of young people that are dying from fentanyl."

Culture

Although El Camino has its struggles, one area that is thriving: its culture. Although they have limited traditional community hubs such as libraries and museums, the community has pioneered their own. One key spot is the Avenue D Rec Center which provides programs for all ages. From vibrant events in the international plaza, book clubs, kids athletics to neighborhood, the El Camino community is driven to work together to grow healthy habits while having fun. Luis mentioned that two of the largest and most anticipated events in the community are the Puerto Rican Parade and the Puerto Rican Festival, where residents play games such as dominoes, play music and dance. Funding for projects located in El Camino has been going on since 2015 by Ibero-American Development Corporation. They are affiliated with the Ibero American Action League which has been working in the community since 1968, with its mission to provide services within the community to Latino people and the underserved.

Another vibrant sector of El Camino is its art. The community is surrounded by large murals, many of which can be found on the El Camino Trail. Although many of these art pieces were a part of the city's beautification process, residents found their own ways of expression through art. For example, a trashcan along the El Camino Trail reads quotes such as "A better world starts with you" and "Stop the violence". This form of street art can be found throughout the community. Art is helping people overcome the hardships in El Camino, making the community stronger through shared sentiments and values. A good example of this, according to Luis, is music. While commenting on the culture of the El Camino neighborhood, he said:

"Music is something that helps us to deal with our situation when we are down, music. That's why you see on Sundays a lot of events here at the International Plaza, across the street. Because we know that from traditions, music is our thing, especially salsa, merengue, bolero, bachata."

The El Camino neighborhood is home to three NCP partners, including the Father Tracy Advocacy Center, The People's Pantry, and Baden Street Settlement Center. FTAC was founded in honor of Father Laurence Tracy, a well-known and respected priest in the neighborhood who had a reputation for helping those struggling in life. The Center provides services such as workforce development, access to treatment for addiction, healthcare connections, and more. As one of the anchor agencies for the NCP, FTAC works closely with the other agencies in the area. The People's Pantry is one of these agencies that provides food as well as diapers, feminine products, and pet food. One of the oldest organizations in the neighborhood is Baden Street Settlement. Baden Street was started in 1901, and originally provided cultural, practical, and social education to young women immigrants that were new to America. Today, Baden Street provides a range of services, including emergency assistance, case management, and counseling and support for addiction. The Counseling and Support Center is a part of the NCP, providing addiction assistance and support.

Luis has lived in the El Camino neighborhood for 43 years, originally coming from Puerto Rico. Throughout his time in the neighborhood he has gotten to know a large number of the other residents, which was helpful for him while participating in outreach events for over 20 years. He initially specialized in HIV and AIDS education in the '90s, when the issue was very abundant. He retired in 2017, but was offered a position in the Father Tracy Advocacy Center as a service coordinator by the former director. His favorite part of the neighborhood is Don Samuel Torres Park, a place he has fond memories of, such as playing softball in the Puerto Rican League.