Good morning everyone!

My name is Sebrena Rhodes and I live in an underserved community in Washington DC.  I am serving in my second term as ANC Commissioner and also a Community Organizer with Empower DC.

Our goal is to bring resources to our community that will stay and encourage district agencies to engage with the residents in a meaningful way.  The problem we have had is making sure everyone has access to services and information, especially to those who are experiencing homelessness and seniors.  Sometimes, searching for services to help with specific issues is like searching for a needle in a haystack or just not enough staff to cover being out in the field.

I would like to suggest that reaching out to folks takes going to where we go and meeting us where we are.  Neighborhood Health Clinics, Pediatric centers, Housing Counseling Services, Dept. of Social Services (DHS, DSS, Social Security office), Hospitals, Churches, Non Profit Organizations, Mental Health services, Tenant Assistance and Advocate offices, Home Health services and the clients, Schools and Colleges, AARP.

A lot of Non Profit Organizations and "SOME" Elected Officials are engaging with residents on the ground in fenceline communities who wouldn't normally be in these circles or even know what it's about (speaking about OIRA).  There should be classes offered at the schools (Middle/High) and community meetings to learn about these programs, agencies, regulations, legislations, and yes to help decipher and/or help create the materials and tools.  Start early so it will be part of life.  Not the other way around.  Have a Community Advisory Board to go over the materials, identify what's needed or not, check for understanding of the language and visuals.  Present at Community and Civic meetings.  Reach out to Community Stakeholders and Leaders.  Have small visuals on public transportation, on the TV in doctor offices, etc.

We must be included in all decisions that affect us as citizens and residents, especially in underserved communities.  The time for us being afterthoughts is over and it's time to be engaged in every aspect of our lives in a natural and holistic way.  Too many decisions are being made on our behalf without our input.

Thank you!

Sebrena Rhodes