

Qualitative Interviews for Participants in the PHL Housing+ Project

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Description of PHL Housing + Program | Research Project

PHLHousing+ is a program administered by the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation that provides monthly cash assistance to 300 low-income families who were randomly selected from the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) wait lists. The Jaffee lab is the primary source for research on the efficacy of this program. While this research can consist of surveys, focus groups, and cross-comparison with other demographic data, the majority of my work for the project was in organizing and conducting qualitative interviews.

Methods in Qualitative Interviews | My Role

At the start of the summer, we set a goal of conducting thirty interviews by the end of August. We have completed thirty-nine. Interviews were typically conducted in person at the participant's home. A minority took place at a place of work, a public place, or virtually. We drove or used public transportation to get to our destinations. Interviews varied length - wise but typically were about an hour. There is a protocol with eighteen questions which we used to structure our interviews. Questions would not always follow a specific order, and we would often ask questions that are not on the protocol if they provided different insights. We occasionally omitted questions that were not relevant to the participant. Questions focused on basic background demographic info, the participant's initial impressions of the program, how participant's have used the assistance, affects of the payments on health and wellbeing, affects of the payments on family and kids, and the pros and cons of cash assistance as opposed to housing vouchers.

Findings

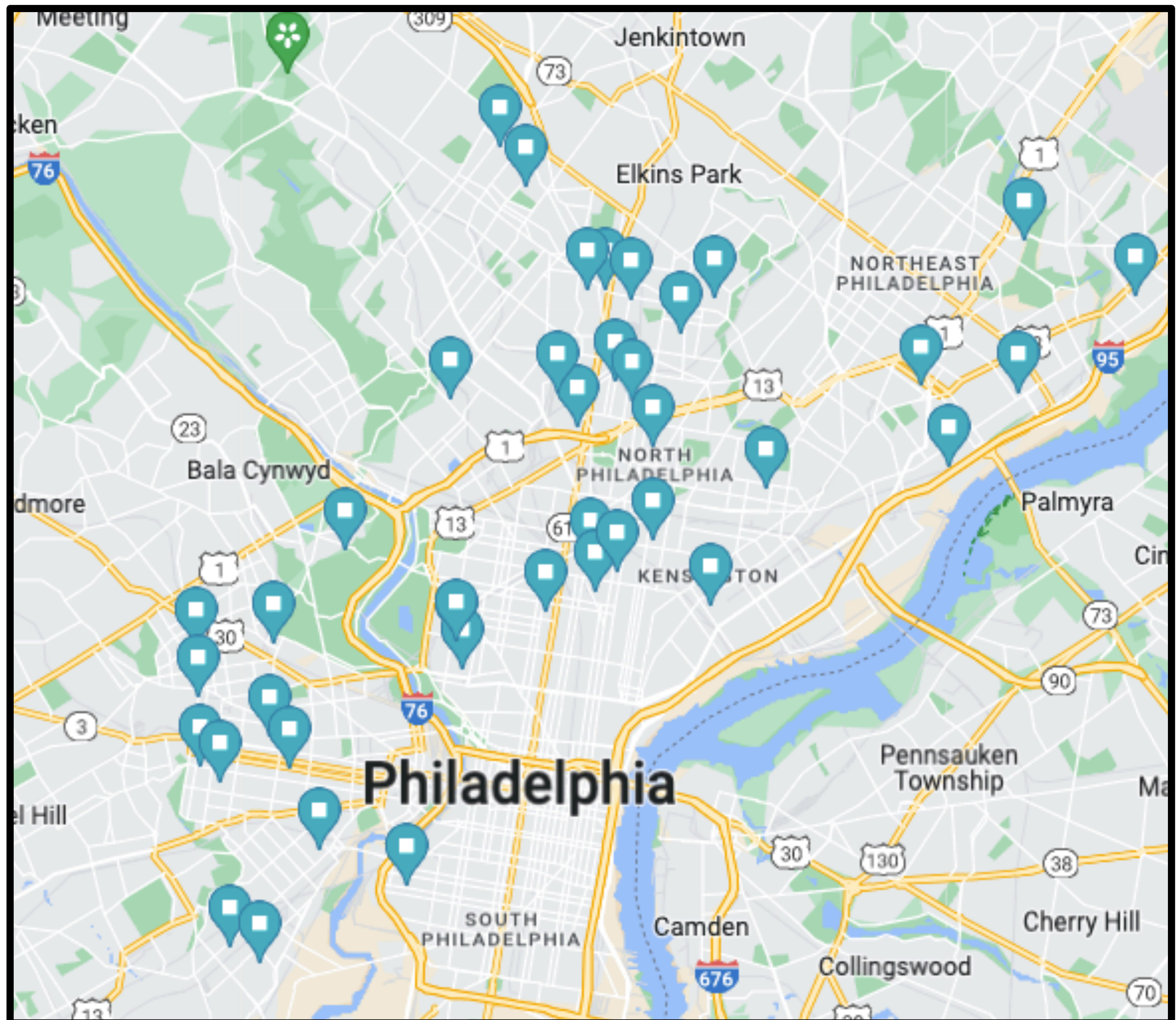
Uniform effects of the program are difficult to draw since different families receive vastly different amounts depending on their demographic details. That being said, we observed a cluster of effects which we broke into categories for the sake of analyzing.

Financial well-being: The program enabled many interviewees to move out of debt and begin saving. It also improved the sense of financial independence among most respondents.

Health: While most respondents did not identify a direct effect on physical health, many reported decreased stress levels as a result of financial security.

Housing Security: The program enabled some people to move a while and allowed some people to stay in their current residence and avoid becoming unhoused. Homeownership and leaving Philadelphia were common long-term goals that have been enabled by the program.

Family: Many participants reported having more time and or money to spend with their children. The program affected school choice as well. Either by moving to a different area, paying for private school, or having extra time to commute, many parents were able to use the money to improve their children's education.



Map of Interviewed Households

As you can tell from this map, most households we interviewed lived in North Philly or West Philly. That being said, the spread of households across the Philadelphia area presents a good variety of perspectives. We also prioritized interviewing households who had moved since the start of the program. These perspectives were helpful in understanding the forces that motivate people to live in certain places.

Next Steps

The research project is the second year of a three year timeline. Going forward, we are hoping to conduct similar interviews with people receiving housing vouchers and people receiving no assistance. The end goal of this project is to establish the benefits and drawbacks of the cash assistance model as opposed to the housing voucher and find areas of improvement for similar future programs.

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