On December 7, 2010, the IMPACT Research Team gathered at Westminster Presbyterian Church to both review and process the information we have collected thus far and to discern how best to proceed. Under the leadership of co-facilitators, Lauren Gilchrist Chapin and Peter Gates, with the assistance of Lead Organizer Sarah Tarbell, the research team has already conducted interviews with the Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children & Families (CCF), the Mental Health Coalition, Western State Hospital, and Region Ten Planning Services Board in an effort to define the extent of the problems facing the community with regard to mental health. In the coming weeks, we are planning to meet with the University of Virginia Health System in conjunction with the University Medical Association, On Our Own, Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership (VOCAL), Counseling and Psychological Services at UVA (CAPS), Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the Regional Jail with Offender and Restoration Services (OAR).

Based on the large scope of information we have received, the research team has voted to further investigate individuals between the ages of 16-25 with mental health problems who are currently untreated, though our focus remains open as we continue our research. According to a report published by Steven Stern and Ali Taylor in 2009, approximately 26,000 individuals in Planning District 10 (Charlottesville City, Albemarle, Greene, Nelson, and Louisa Counties) over the age of 18 (15.2% of the adult population) are experiencing mental health problems. Of those 26,000 individuals, approximately 14,000 (52.8%) are under the age of 40 and 7,000 (22.0%) are below the poverty level. In the 2007 Human Services Strategic Plan put forth by the CCF, “expanding affordable and accessible preventative and early intervention mental health services for adults, as well as psychotherapeutic and medication management services for adults struggling with moderate mental health issues” was identified as a top community priority in need of “community-level planning.” Additionally, in a recent survey, conducted by the CCF, 8 out of 10 commissioners identified adult mental health services as one of the three highest areas of need in our community. Whatever deficiencies remain within the system, mental health services for children seem to be better-funded and more comprehensive than those provided to adults in our area.

As we continue our research, we are reminded of the continual need to eradicate the long-standing stigma against those with mental health problems and to ascertain how we are addressing mental health within our own congregations. In addition to our upcoming research interviews, we are planning to conduct a survey amongst IMPACT congregations regarding mental health. Our next Research Team meeting will take place on January 11th at which time we plan to finalize an area of focus. If you have information about the mental health situation in the community or if you have a personal testimony that you would like to share please contact Lauren (gilchrist.lauren@gmail.com) or Peter (ptg3va@gmail.com).