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Building Healthy Communities

Community Safety:

A Building Block for Healthy Communities

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DEVELOPED BY:
Prevention Institute
Advancement Project

The California Endowment

PREVENTION INSTITUTE is a non-profit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. Determined to improve health and safety for everyone, Prevention Institute builds prevention and equity into key policies and actions to transform the places where people live, work, play and learn. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on community prevention, injury and violence prevention, health equity, healthy eating and active living, positive youth development, transforming our health system, and mental health and well-being. Benita Tsao, Rachel A. Davis and Casey Tran contributed to this report. www.preventioninstitute.org

ADVANCEMENT PROJECT is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California we champion the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. We build alliances and trust, use data-driven policy solutions, create innovative tools and work alongside communities to ignite social transformation. Since 1999, Advancement Project has expanded the tools available to end inequity and transform the large public systems that impact the lives of millions of Californians. The Urban Peace program at Advancement Project reduces and prevents community violence by applying public health methods to understand the underlying reasons for violence and create innovative, holistic ways to change the conditions that lead to them. Urban Peace has provided technical assistance and training to over 20 communities throughout California and across the country, supporting safety efforts to ensure that children can learn, families can thrive, and communities can prosper. Susan Lee and Virginia Lee contributed to this report. www.advancementprojectca.org

THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10-year, $1 billion commitment of The California Endowment (TCE). A primary tenet of the Building Healthy Communities initiative is that place matters, i.e. where one lives determines how one fares in health, safety and well-being. Fourteen communities across California are working to create places where children are healthy, safe and ready to learn through prevention and change strategies aimed at transforming community institutions, policies and systems. These communities have long histories dealing with policies that have institutionalized class, race and ethnic disparities in education, health and human services, and local government planning decisions. BHC sites are addressing these entrenched disparities with a fundamental belief in the power of a functioning democracy in which all people are valued and included. This is done by building resident power, youth leadership, promoting lasting policy changes, and creating a new narrative about the strengths and capacities of communities to thrive. www.calendow.org

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Introduction

Through its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, The California Endowment has committed to a 10-year investment in 14 California communities around the state. These communities are working to create places where children are healthy, safe and ready to learn. In the initial community-driven planning process, a large majority of the sites—70 percent—identified violence and a lack of safety as their highest priority. This paper highlights the strategies that these BHC communities have prioritized to make safer communities a reality. It reflects the BHC communities' collective wisdom about what they need and how to get there.

Why A Community-Driven, Place-Based Approach Is Essential

Communities cannot thrive or enjoy good health unless they are safe. Violence and fear of violence increase the risk of poor health outcomes and also undermine the community supports and conditions that would otherwise promote health and well-being. For too long, community safety was understood and approached largely as a criminal justice issue, without attention to the underlying causes of violence. Now, however, BHC sites and other places recognize safety as a community health issue and are developing place-based solutions tailored to the unique needs of their communities. People who live in a place must be involved in defining the problem and the solutions.

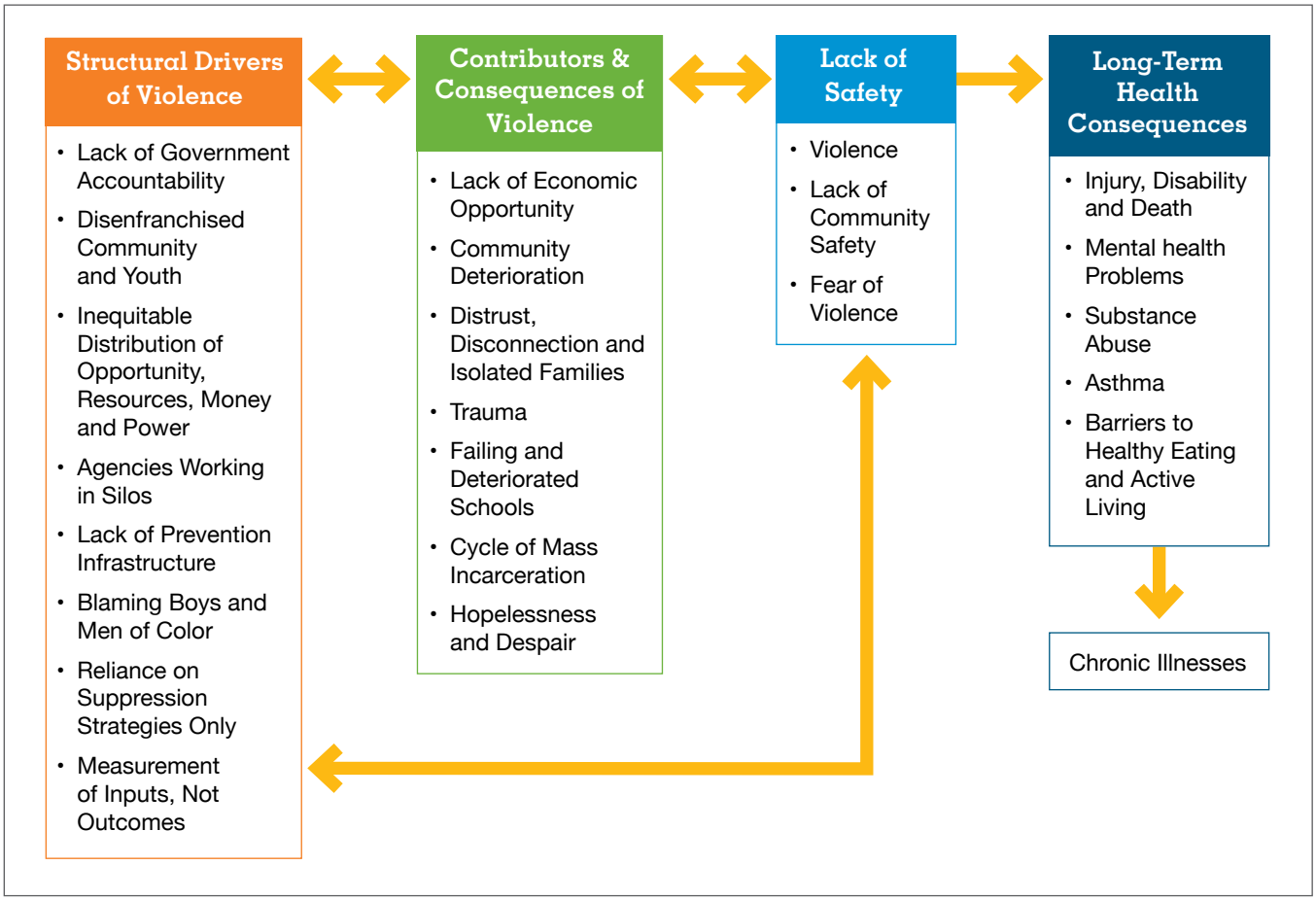
There is no "one size fits all" community safety solution; each community has its own history, assets, and capacities. Myriad conditions fuel violence and protect against it, and the context and local conditions determine what mix of safety strategies will have the greatest impact. For example, a community where violence is rampant must first stop the shootings and establish a basic level of public safety. A community with less visible violence but with generations of gang entrenchment may focus instead on creating alternatives to gang life for young people and children. There, a comprehensive approach that coordinates prevention, intervention, community policing, and re-entry strategies will be most effective.

Safety strategies must also take into account the physical places people live, work, play and learn, because the look and feel of a neighborhood can affect safety and perceptions of safety. Communities of color and low-income areas typically receive less public and private investment and, as a result, can appear more disordered and may be perceived as unsafe. Large numbers of pawn shops, check-cashing store fronts, and convenience and liquor stores contribute to this.[1] Strategies that affect land use, the built environment, and zoning can improve safety. Good community design can also strengthen community networks and trust by encouraging interactions among neighbors.[2]

The Causes of Unsafe, Unhealthy Communities

The circumstances that give rise to violence are also made worse by violence, feeding a cycle of poor community health. Based on the experiences of BHC sites, Diagram 1 depicts this process in which a lack of safety worsens the risk factors for violence, thus perpetuating violence. This dynamic is core to the theory of change applied by BHC sites, illustrated in Diagram 2.

Diagram 1. The Causes of Unsafe, Unhealthy Communities



Structural Drivers of Violence set the stage for unsafe communities. Too often, these forces have disenfranchised communities, deprived men and boys of color of opportunities, and propagated suppression strategies even when they're not warranted. They are systematic processes that create conditions, such as community deterioration, disconnected and isolated families, and multi-generational trauma, that increase the likelihood of violence. In Diagram 1, these undesirable conditions are called ***Contributors and Consequences of Violence***, since they both make violence more likely and are reinforced by violence. For example:

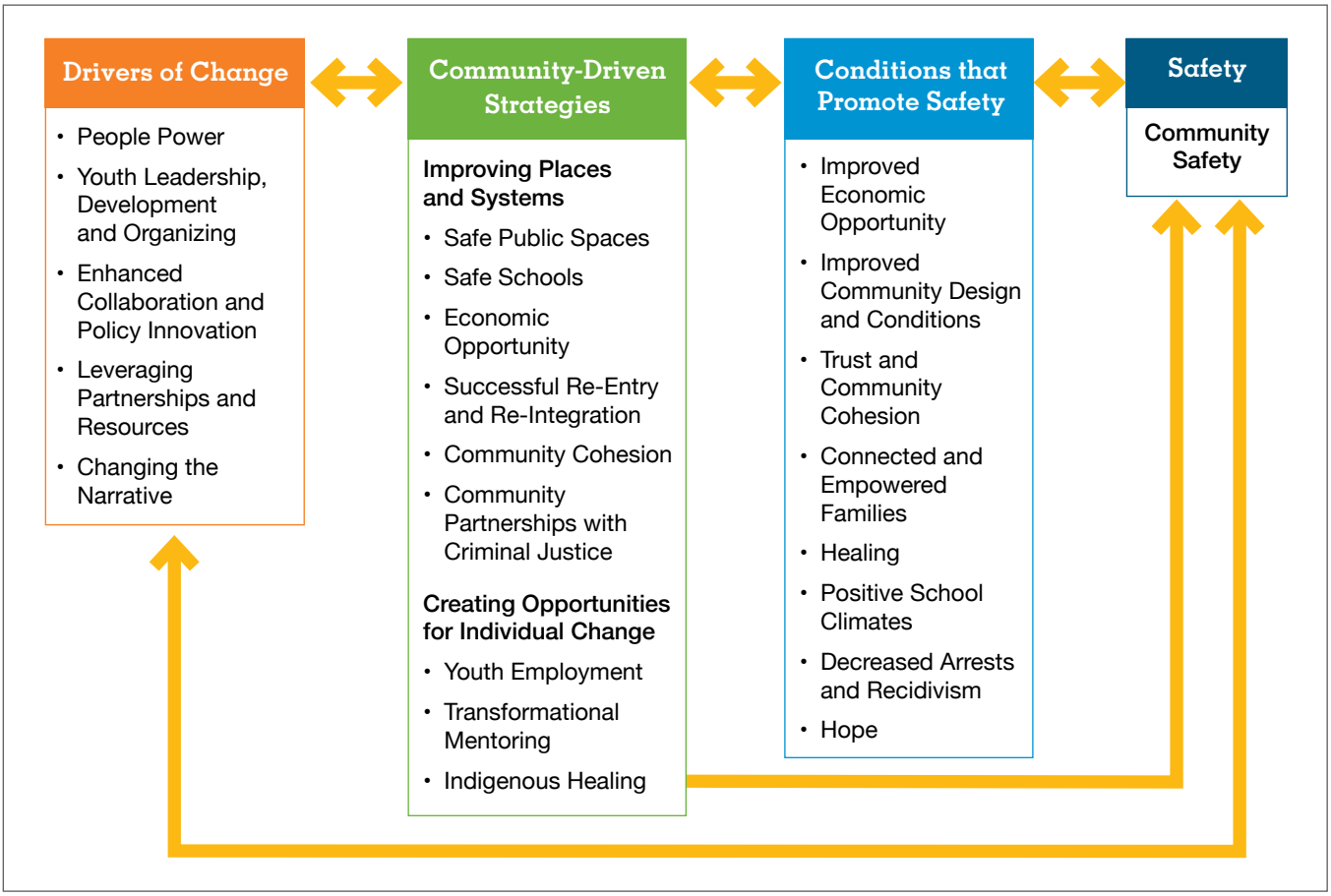
- A lack of local jobs is a risk factor for violence, and violence, in turn, makes a neighborhood less attractive to investors and businesses, making jobs even scarcer.
- Fear of violence erodes trust and social ties, so residents are isolated and not able to participate in group processes that promote community safety. In the absence of grassroots momentum toward solutions, violence continues unchecked.

The fallout from violence, fear of violence, and lack of community safety is enormous and has far-reaching implications. Community violence is correlated with asthma,[3,4,5] and lack of safety increases the likelihood of many other health problems. People who experience violence are at higher risk for chronic illness,[6,7] for instance, and when parks aren't safe, people are less active.[8,9] Violence clearly shapes the community environment in many ways that undermine health.

Promoting Community Safety to Build Healthy Communities

BHC sites actively promote community safety by interrupting the cycle that produces unsafe communities. In studying the experience of BHC sites, a theory of change emerged that might be useful for replicating BHC successes in other communities. Diagram 2 presents a theory of change for BHC sites that have prioritized safety.

Diagram 2. Building Community Safety within the BHC Initiative



All BHC sites have put into motion the ***Drivers of Change*** identified by The California Endowment. These drivers support the identification and implementation of ***Community-Driven Strategies***. The ***Strategies*** are designed to foster ***Conditions that Promote Safety,*** which can counteract the ***Contributors to and Consequences of Violence*** in Diagram 1. Community safety, in turn, enhances the readiness and capacity of a community to apply the ***Drivers of Change.***

People most impacted by violence must be involved in developing solutions. In BHC sites that prioritized safety, youth and other residents identified ways to activate the ***Drivers of Change*** and developed ***Community-Driven Strategies*** that prevent violence. The rest of this publication maps out the ***Drivers of Change*** and the ***Community-Driven Strategies*** BHC sites pursued to make their communities safer.

Drivers of Change

The BHC Drivers of Change are essential for changing conditions, systems and policies so they support community safety strategies. These overarching elements are: People Power; Youth Leadership, Development and Organizing; Enhanced Collaboration and Policy Innovation; Leveraging Partnerships and Resources; and Changing the Narrative. These drivers are not only the foundation for safety but for any transformative, sustainable community change within the BHC framework. Together they enhance communities' power to put in motion their own solutions, tell their own stories, and hold public sector systems accountable to their needs.

People Power

Building the power of the people in communities to bring about the change they seek is a cornerstone of The California Endowment's BHC initiative. BHC sites recognize the value of community input. As a result, those most affected by violence are involved in customizing community safety strategies and shaping policy agendas.

Not all communities experience the same intensity of violence or the same safety concerns. This means that safety strategies are more likely to succeed by tapping the skills, abilities and wisdom of each community. Communities can design solutions that work for their unique needs, and residents can be empowered to participate in the process and to act as change agents. Maximizing People Power requires intentional investment so people and communities have a seat at the table, function as effective advocates, and build bonds that enhance their collective power. More than half of the BHC projects that focus on organizing also embrace training as an important mechanism for developing advocacy skills.

Many communities are fragmented across racial and ethnic lines as demographics rapidly shift. To be inclusive of marginalized or emerging groups within the community, it's important to understand power dynamics and any history of tension or conflict. Building people power across races, ethnicities, classes, and ages creates a more authentic and inclusive history of the community and allows previously disconnected people to come together under the common goal of achieving safety.

> "Across the BHC communities, local residents are understanding their leadership and change-making potential, lifting their voices in public forums, and exercising real power."
>
> –from *Building Healthy Communities: Five Drivers of Change*

People Power—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Leadership development for survivors of violence so they're able to represent the community and serve on advisory committees that improve program design, operations and services delivery.
- Work with Hmong, Mien and Lao residents to proactively engage in public decision-making processes, articulate a common vision, and navigate mainstream systems and institutions to advance community goals.

Youth Leadership, Development and Organizing

Engaging youth helps identify and implement safety strategies that will take hold, have a positive impact, and continue to make a difference over the long haul. In too many places, youth voices tend to be marginalized in policy-making processes. Special attention is needed to develop and nurture leadership not only for young people who are ready to engage, but also those who are disconnected and young people especially impacted by violence.

In particular, it is important to engage young men and boys of color who have lived experience with violence or have been involved with foster care or in criminal justice or some other system. Their influence can yield solutions that are especially relevant, effective and sustainable. The active participation of local young people in community safety casts them in a positive light and in itself challenges the narrative that assumes young men and boys of color are deviant.

> "Young people who have firsthand experience with inequitable school discipline practices, interpersonal violence, and incarceration are poised to speak with authenticity and to help organize their peers to transform their communities, if given the opportunity."
>
> –from *Building Healthy Communities: Five Drivers of Change*

Youth Leadership, Development and Organizing—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Create opportunities for youth to gather data to frame the problems as they see them, and provide venues for education and dialogue on issues, context, and policies that affect their communities. The process of gathering data, sharing stories, and lifting up local voices can be an empowering experience for the community members and can support youth development and multigenerational connections.
- Offer professional development and applied leadership opportunities for youth to participate in high-level meetings with decision-makers, and to serve on committees, work groups, councils, and other stakeholder tables and networks.

Enhanced Collaboration and Policy Innovation

Dismantling structural inequities that promote violence requires more than just innovative programs that engage the most affected community members. Government institutions such as schools, social services and criminal justice must improve how they operate with each other and in relation to other systems, community-based organizations, and residents. Systems that share power in the pursuit of shared outcomes such as community safety are able to tackle the root conditions that fuel violence.

BHC sites realize that only through alignment and coordination can they resolve complex, large-scale problems. Many benefit from established partnerships, engaged residents, ongoing investment, and a constellation of programs that address violence. To enhance collaboration and have an even greater impact, some BHC sites have developed strategic plans for integrating systems and changing policies.

Many BHC communities seek to reform existing policies around safety. Policy innovation can be enormously helpful in shifting norms, the commonly-held expectations and understanding of what counts as acceptable behavior in a given context. For many decades, all manner of policies have reinforced structural racism and exacerbated violence dynamics. For example, many school discipline policies disproportionately punish students of color and punish them more harshly than White students who break the same rules. These unfair practices disrupt learning, make it less likely that students of color graduate from high school, affect their chances for success, and diminish their lifetime earnings. Changing such policies to become more equitable, to support prevention and intervention strategies, and to promote restorative and healing practices rather than punitive ones is essential for establishing social norms that promote, rather than undermine, community health and safety.

> "There is a critical need to "bust silos" and pull unlikely partners together to work on issues that might be outside their mission but address the common goal of community well-being."
>
> –from *Building Healthy Communities: Five Drivers of Change*

Enhanced Collaboration and Policy Innovation— *Examples from BHC Sites*

- Work across sectors to implement positive behavioral support systems or restorative practices. Emphasize coordination with schools and collaboration on the basis of common goals that trump sector-specific objectives.
- Engage boys and men of color who have been injured by violence to better understand their health-related needs, how they access care, the barriers they encounter, and how they re-establish a sense of safety in a hostile environment.

Leveraging Partnerships and Resources

For too long, community safety has been understood and approached largely as a criminal justice issue. In BHC sites and elsewhere, it's now recognized as a community health issue that can only be addressed with the involvement of the whole community. Communities cannot arrest their way out of violence, nor can they achieve safety without support from key sectors such as schools, public health, and law enforcement.

Efforts to prevent violence will be more effective when multiple private, public, and community players come together in a strategic and coordinated way. In one national assessment, for example, cities with the most coordinated approaches also had the lowest rates of youth violence.[10] Strategic partnerships that build on the efforts of all partners can maximize effectiveness. Such partnerships bring new networks, constituencies, audiences, and outlets together under one coherent umbrella, far expanding the group's reach and longevity.

Though individual groups may take responsibility for discrete pieces of the work, BHC members also implement joint strategies. When two or more partners in a single BHC site work in tandem to implement a particular strategy or to address a specific need, they combine their unique strengths and areas of expertise, and can accomplish more ambitious goals. They're also able to aggregate available funding and leverage a greater array of resources to address violence, which often overlooked due to a lack of political or social will.

Changing the Narrative

The BHC initiative itself is changing the narrative around violence. Through its focus on prevention and intervention strategies, the initiative offers an alternative to a law enforcement-driven approach to safety. It also confronts the misconception that boys and men of color are the problem and are inherently violent. The grassroots mechanisms that BHC emphasizes challenge the top-down powers that too often recommend a stand-alone, evidence-based program with a narrow focus and small effect, instead of a comprehensive, tailored set of community-driven strategies. As a whole, the BHC initiative and the sites help shift the narrative toward one where:

- violence is seen as preventable;
- the inclusion and empowerment of historically marginalized communities, and especially youth, are seen as necessary;
- public sector institutions like schools and law enforcement change the way they interact with communities; and
- trauma is recognized and addressed as a matter of course.

A large majority of BHC communities identified violence as a major issue and work specifically to change the default narrative around safety. "The culture in our communities perpetuates the tolerance, if not acceptance, of violence as a necessary evil," wrote one BHC site representative. Others observed that some people failed to acknowledge the wide range of social conditions and circumstances that affect community safety. By changing the way residents, decision-makers, and the news media conceptualize and talk about violence, BHC communities can counter widespread apathy and increase support for local initiatives that promote safety. They are changing the narrative by amplifying community voices and through media advocacy.*

> "BHC is seeking to weave a new narrative about community health and prevention, one that recognizes the environmental, political, and economic determinants of health."
>
> –from *Building Healthy Communities: Five Drivers of Change*

Changing the Narrative—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Train young people in multimedia reporting and education campaigns, so they can share the full range of the community's stories with a wider audience. Youth have shared success stories and updates via local access television, radio stations, print newspapers, websites, social media, online videos, poetry slams and theater productions.
- Write articles and opinion pieces to re-frame issues. For example, when news media in one BHC site credited the police department for the lowest homicide rate in 33 years, the Neighborhood Safety Director wrote an article on the value of strong partnerships, the contributions of an engaged, caring community, and the success of an intensive mentoring program: "The police officers certainly deserve recognition, but so do the young men who have decided to stop the violence. I am truly grateful to the many young men who when faced with potentially lethal contention, made healthier decisions."

•Media advocacy is the strategic use of mass media to influence policy-makers, who in turn can improve environments in ways that promote community safety. By building relationships with reporters, producers, editors and others in news media, BHC hub partners can position themselves as valued sources for information, contacts, and a fresh perspective.

Community-Driven Strategies

In BHC sites that identified violence as a major problem, youth and other residents identified specific strategies for making their communities safer. Some strategies focus on supporting individuals, while others improve places and systems more broadly and benefit the community and all its members. The strategies underway in BHC sites fall into two broad areas:

Improving Places and Systems
- Safe Public Spaces
- Safe Schools
- Economic Opportunity
- Successful Re-Entry and Re-Integration
- Community Cohesion
- Community Partnerships with Criminal Justice

Creating Opportunities for Individual Change
- Youth Employment
- Transformative Mentoring
- Healing Circles

Improving Places and Systems

SAFE PUBLIC SPACES

Strategies that promote safe public spaces reclaim streets, parks, or community centers for positive uses, and they create new pockets of peace and calm in areas where violence has been all too common. These strategies may also establish new norms around conflict in public spaces and make it less socially acceptable. They often result in unusual new partnerships, such as among parks, housing, faith- and community-based groups, police and the school district.

By employing a range of strategies to create safe havens, many BHC communities are addressing the tough realities that residents face, such as entrenched gang-driven violence. To reverse decades of underinvestment in these areas, BHC communities are rebuilding neighborhood infrastructure, such as adequate lighting, libraries and recreation facilities, for example.

Safe Public Spaces—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Initiate Summer Night Lights and similar summer safety strategies, so public agencies and community groups reclaim neighborhood parks and gyms, and residents can gather at night and on weekends to socialize, eat together and participate in recreation programs.
- Build new recreation facilities and open youth centers as safe spaces for mentoring, family support and re-entry services, and academic and career help.
- Train “violence interrupters” to address brewing conflicts and proactively build peace, and train street outreach workers to support people in making positive life changes.
- Organize night walks led by trained clergy and volunteers in neighborhoods affected by violence, to reach out to residents and involve them in community safety efforts.
- Convert vacant lots or underutilized neighborhood spaces into community gardens or farmers’ markets so residents can gather and interact in safe spaces that also promote healthy behavior.

SAFE SCHOOLS

To discourage bullying, truancy and drop-out, safe schools strategies promote a safe, positive campus climate for all students and staff. They also re-examine school policies to ensure they support academic success and welcome the involvement of parents and other community stakeholders. Fear of violence at and around school interferes with attendance, learning, academic achievement and parents' involvement. BHC communities are working with educators to ensure local schools have adequate resources to provide a quality education and create a positive, welcoming climate for students, staff and parents.

Community-driven strategies also push back against school policies that have undermined safety and punished some student groups more harshly than others. For example, zero-tolerance policies and other strict disciplinary policies often push Black and Latino boys out of school and into the juvenile justice system, a phenomenon called the school-to-prison pipeline. This effectively puts higher education, gainful employment, and other positive life opportunities out of reach for an entire generation of youth, especially boys and young men of color.

BHC sites reiterate the importance of safe places where young people feel they belong and can participate in meaningful activities, and where families can connect with one another. These venues are harder to come by in neighborhoods affected by violence, and a quality school can be an important hub for promoting resilience and addressing community safety concerns.

Safe Schools—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Adopt alternatives to zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies. Restorative justice, for instance, can promote a more positive school climate.
- Change school and law enforcement practices to improve how these systems interact with students, to help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, and decrease arrests of students.
- Develop strategic plans to promote school safety, in partnership with parents, community, schools and other systems that interact with youth.
- Increase students' access to counseling and other mental and behavioral health services that specifically address trauma and promote healing, whether through comprehensive school-based health and wellness centers or a robust school-and-community referral system.
- Station volunteers along common routes to school, so they can watch over blocks and bus stops, protect students from harassment and gang recruitment, and deter gang activity in the hours before and after school.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

These strategies support home-grown entrepreneurs, create incentives for businesses to open in areas with higher crime rates, and explore policies that increase hiring of qualified, formerly-incarcerated individuals. They increase access to affordable goods and services, and allow community members to be self-sufficient and meet basic needs without turning to crime.

Safe communities are often those that can offer jobs that pay a living wage and are able to support local businesses. Violence and fear of violence discourage investment and scare off potential employers, and yet increasing job opportunities and improving the economic climate must be part of any effort to reduce violence and crime. Many BHC sites are pursuing strategies that simultaneously strengthen the local economy and prevent community violence, recognizing that these outcomes go hand in hand.

Economic Opportunity—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Expand employment and job training opportunities for men of color to gain marketable skills and work experience.
- Work with employers to prioritize the hiring of local workers, and matching residents with mentors in the business sector.
- Link jobs creation to broader economic development and community improvement strategies.
- Adopt hiring practices that welcome staff members who have lived experience and are positive role models for having successfully left the gang life, for example.
- Pursue “ban the box” legislation, whereby initial job application forms do not include a criminal history question, so formerly-incarcerated candidates are not eliminated outright and can be considered on the basis of their qualifications.

SUCCESSFUL RE-ENTRY AND RE-INTEGRATION

Successful re-entry and re-integration allows people returning home from detention or incarceration to transition smoothly into community life, find stable jobs and housing, and be productive and self-sufficient. African Americans are imprisoned at nearly six times the rate of Whites, and Latinos at nearly double the rates of Whites,[11] and the persistent removal of people of color to prison damages social networks and distorts social norms.[12,13] This means that places with high rates of violence are often the least prepared to fully reintegrate system-involved individuals into the community.

BHC sites are tackling this challenge by: 1) increasing coordination of services, 2) improving access to services and 3) increasing the quality of services. To break the cycle of mass incarceration and to reinforce non-violent choices and behaviors, BHC communities emphasize greater coordination of services related to education, employment, health, housing, and life skills. As one BHC community partner stated, "The best mechanism for people to successfully return to their community is to develop seamless programming and services that are integrated into the larger community of service providers."

Successful Re-Entry and Re-Integration—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Conduct outreach in facilities before people transition out of the system, and establish a network of first-stop welcoming centers that provide integrated health and human services.
- Organize monthly gatherings for service providers and a wide variety of stakeholders, and develop an integrated, seamless re-entry management system.
- Increase access to services or tailor services to address the specific needs of formerly-incarcerated individuals, including women and girls. When adjusting to life on the outside, individuals and their families benefit from the intensive, personalized attention that a comprehensive community-based system can offer.

COMMUNITY COHESION

A community is cohesive when its members feel connected, trust one another, and share a group identity. Community cohesion is necessary for a group to believe it can accomplish a goal together; without it, residents cannot harness the power of collective action to advocate for the changes they want in their community.[14,15,16]

Because violence breaks bonds among people, residents in unsafe communities have an even greater need for social connection. Each community will have varying levels of capacity for civic participation within and across groups. More intensive, tailored, or separate approaches may be needed to engage particular sub-populations, such as recent immigrant groups.

Leaders at BHC sites noted that youth and residents have felt marginalized, and that gang violence has worsened people's sense of alienation. They also cited history, language barriers, immigration status, rapid demographic shifts, or other circumstances that discouraged social connections and civic engagement. To overcome this deep sense of separation, BHC sites brought together isolated community members. The sites also brought together multiple communities with shared interests, in order to leverage community cohesion and accomplish a particular aim.

Community Cohesion—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Develop leadership skills among residents most affected by violence, so they can mobilize others to participate in a community safety campaign and ensure no group is left out.
- Build the capacity of residents, youth, promotoras and others to collaborate with elected leaders and public agencies in crafting and implementing a comprehensive plan for preventing violence affecting youth.
- Bring together organizers working in Black communities across a large metropolitan area for professional development.
- Mobilize boys and young men in the African American, Latino and Southeast Asian communities across multiple BHC sites in a region, to scale back the criminalization of youth of color.
- Develop a shared agenda among various ethnic communities to address gang violence and other neighborhood priorities, and to increase their political relevance and voting power.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE

BHC sites recognize the importance of trusting relationships between police and the community they are sworn to protect. Strategies that improve these relationships can transform the historically antagonistic dynamic into a more productive, collaborative one. Violence in any given place is directly affected by how residents interface with law enforcement, courts, probation, and other criminal justice institutions. Taking even small steps to increase trust and understanding can change how violence manifests. These steps can also create the space for law enforcement and the community to agree on their respective roles and responsibilities, and eventually embark on more collaborative work.

Community Partnerships with Criminal Justice—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Implement collaborative models for reducing violence, such as Operation Ceasefire, Safe Passages and Summer Night Lights (see pages 14 and 15, Safe Public Spaces and Safe Schools).
- Initiate partnerships among the community, schools, law enforcement to reduce truancy, suspensions, expulsions and arrests, especially of boys and young men of color.
- Work to reform the juvenile justice system so it is less punitive and more rehabilitative, such as by emphasizing restorative justice, diversion programs and other more community-based alternatives to juvenile detention.

Creating Opportunities For Individual Change

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

BHC sites vouch for strategies such as vocational training and job placement because they offer a lifeline to youth in communities affected by violence. It's clear in many BHC sites that meaningful employment offers an alternative to violent behavior and can help young people avoid recruitment or leave the gang life. Youth who learn marketable skills and gain work experience are well-positioned for future success, and employment support and a second chance can be a boon for hard-to-employ young people who have dropped out of school or have criminal records. If these opportunities are made widely available in all BHC sites, youth employment strategies can improve community safety.

Youth Employment—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Provide on-the-job training, placement and support services for gang-affiliated, system-involved and homeless youth, or others considered at risk for being a victim or perpetrator of violence.
- Integrate a trauma-informed approach in work-based learning experiences for youth. This approach features youth leadership development, active awareness of the behavioral effects of trauma and violence in one's life, and daily practice using evidence-based resiliency tools.
- Train and hire at-risk youth in efforts that promote peace and reduce violence, such as the Summer Night Lights program (see page 14, Safe Public Spaces).

TRANSFORMATIONAL MENTORING

Mentoring strategies match a person with someone who has more life experience, wisdom or knowledge, for an ongoing relationship. By engaging in mutual learning and dialogue with the mentor, the person receives guidance and support in making positive life changes. Mentoring is a mechanism for personal or professional growth, and mentors often act as role models, coaching others to develop their strengths and talents.

In the context of community safety, the people who receive mentoring in BHC sites are usually teens and young adults involved in gangs or are otherwise at risk for being a victim or perpetrator of violence. Many mentoring strategies recruit youth who lack stable relationships with a caring adult and would benefit from a supportive social network.

BHC communities commonly use mentoring as one element of a much broader effort to promote community safety, rarely as a stand-alone program. Mentoring strategies often supplement efforts that have a larger goal and are also usually offered in conjunction with other support services.

Transformational Mentoring—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Develop an intergenerational volunteer network of African American men to mentor and coach students, and develop policy recommendations that would improve the lives of African American male students.
- Recruit and train volunteer coaches and mentors as a component of an after-school soccer program, to promote academic achievement, positive relationships, and reduce involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- Engage mentors who have successfully left the gang life to serve as vocational placement counselors in a gang intervention program. To supplement wrap-around services and trainings, help these mentors support young men in finding legal work and becoming responsible parents.
- Provide mentors for middle school students and their parents as part of a universal school-based violence prevention program.

INDIGENOUS HEALING

Indigenous healing practices are community-based ways for helping people who have experienced trauma recover and thrive. All forms of violence and chronic adversity can cause trauma; boys and men of color and their communities may be at even higher risk than other groups.

BHC sites utilize indigenous healing practices to remedy the effects of trauma in three ways: 1) for people at every stage of life, 2) community-wide, and 3) by promoting trauma-informed systems and institutions. For example, healing circles bring people together to reconnect and support one another and determine a course of collective action. Sharing emotional wounds with a caring group and in a safe place allows people to address the roots of their anger and pain, and learn non-violent ways to cope with frustration and challenges. BHC communities often involve other residents and organizations in a communal healing process. This reflects an understanding that violence and fear of violence affects communities as well as individuals.

Other healing strategies seek to improve systems so institutions that serve the community do not trigger or worsen trauma. For instance, trauma can limit the utility and potential of People Power and Youth Leadership, two Drivers of Change. In light of this such, many BHC communities implement healing strategies as a first step to a longer-term advocacy, organizing or capacity-building initiative. “We equip young leaders with tools to get beyond the trauma of their past, so they can step into a powerful, positive leadership role,” wrote an employee at one BHC-affiliated organization. By helping people heal and become whole again, BHC communities can more effectively push for the social and cultural changes that support community safety.

Indigenous Healing—*Examples from BHC Sites*

- Cross-racial, intergenerational healing alliances that facilitate healing circles for African-American and Latino boys and men.
- Establish a community culture that supports emotional health. Activities include free trainings in Mental First Aid so residents can connect people in crisis to professional care.
- Adapt PhotoVoice storytelling and other community-based research tools, to document the community’s experience of youth violence and generate policy solutions.
- Incorporate restorative justice and trauma-informed standards of care into the school districts, social services, the juvenile justice system, probation departments, and an array of community settings.

Toward Safe and Healthy Communities for All

The BHC Initiative has afforded 14 communities the opportunity to identify their own solutions to promote community safety. At the same time, it's afforded us all the opportunity to learn from what happens when a community sets out to change the very conditions and policies that have contributed to a lack of safety in the first place. Such efforts are a model to understand what's truly needed to promote community safety and build healthy communities.

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