Community Strategies to Improve Population Wide Mental Health and Wellbeing

Making Connections: Chicago Team

Marcus Williams: Youth Board Director/Youth Coach
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WHO WE ARE

- Coalition of diverse community partners
- Schools, non-profits, advocacy groups, social service agencies
- Program was designed and is led by the Making Connections Coalition and a Youth Board of Directors

Our Vision: For men and boys to thrive in their community with a sense of belonging, ownership and safety.

Our Approach: Emphasis on listening. Acknowledging that the community residents are the experts. Giving power to youth. Join and contribute to other coalitions and advocacy groups.
WHO WE ARE

- Mentors from the community
- Youth Coaches from the community
- Youth Board of Directors from the community

- Trainings for staff include Mentoring 101, Mental Health First Aid, Peace Circle Facilitation, and Trauma-Informed Coaching
- All program staff are paid and receive ongoing supervision
## Community Snapshot (North Lawndale, South Lawndale, and Chicago Lawn)

### Youth and community needs
- Access to safe space
- Places to play, compete, chill, relax, and learn
- Inspiring adults
- Consistent and healthy relationships
- Employment opportunities
- A platform to have a “voice”
- Opportunities to be inspired
- Trauma/violence reduction

### Youth and community opportunities
- “the consequences are in your face”
- Opportunities for volunteering
- High resident participation in coalitions and advocacy groups
- Motivated youth
- “we see how bad it is, what else would motivate you to stay in school, help people, and join a team?”
What we are doing about it

• **Cross-age play and sports mentoring**
  • Trauma informed play and sports in public settings
  • Relationship building between men, adolescents and young boys
  • Restorative practices and ongoing discussion on the meaning of manhood and boyhood for young men and boys who reside in the community

• **Rewrite and redefine the community narrative**
  • Photojournalism – pictures and narratives of the community and of themselves
  • Showcase the work done by the youth at community events and through various media outlets

Boys of Today - Men of Tomorrow
Legends of the Future
Why Legends of Lawndale Works

- Community designed, community owned
- The power of healthy, consistent, and trusting relationships
- Access to safe spaces
- SPORTS HEAL!
- Creating opportunities and positive experiences for youth and community members
- Establish robust referral system/social network
- Empowers youth to have a “voice”
- Squad Circles and Peace Circles
- “The truth about stories is, that’s all we are.” - Thomas King
Best Practices and Community Engagement

- Culturally competent staff that reflect changing demographics of population of focus
- Services reflect the needs of the community (trauma informed care/activities)
- TRAUMA is the underlying diagnosis...
- Recognizing the need for a balance of prevention work vs. only providing intervention based services
- Expectations for staff to get out of office (IEP meetings, school meetings, student advocacy, mini mental health)
- SASS program - reduces stigmas, reduces barriers to treatment
- Recognize schools as the heart of a community
Schools and Effective Mental Health Strategies

Schools are the heart of the community and are often the first line of care.
Schools and Effective Mental Health Strategies

For Schools:

- Collaborative grants bring services to schools
- Long-term relationship with schools and community - takes time, trust, and consistency
- Clinic expectations for staff: GET OUT OF YOUR OFFICE!
- SASS Program - reduces barriers to care, immediate services
- Joint grants provide individual, group, and crisis interventions services to the school: a natural and neutral setting for youth and families
- Trauma informed trainings for school staff

In the Community:

- Experiential activities and events
- Examples: summer program, Halloween/holiday party, field trips (local and remote)
- Strong support/referral network
- Collaborations, coalitions, advocacy groups
- Consistent care that reflects needs of the community
Making Connections: The Challenges

• Working through the “vague”
• Creating an energized, purposeful, and committed coalition
• Coordinating, organizing, and developing roles for partners
• Recruitment
• Securing space
• Building trust....everywhere
• Working within a large health system (also a benefit!)
• Policy change
Meaningful partnerships result in collaboration of resources and services

Building a “trauma-informed community”

Challenging your own mission and vision to reflect community needs

Giving power to young people

Let the community guide you