

# Moving to the Outer Layers of the Social Ecological Model: Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence and One Community's Evolution of their "Youth Empowerment Zone."

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## Hugh B. Bain Middle School, Cranston, RI:

- . 631 Students, grades 6-8
- . Title 1 School—68% of students eligible for free or subsidized lunch
- . 15% of students receiving ESL/bilingual education services
- . 16% of students receiving special education services
- . The "Bain+2" afterschool program served 110 students (who attended 30+ days)

\*Data from the 2016-2017 school year

## Previous Classroom Based Intervention:

- . The "Mentors in Violence Prevention" program was offered during the afterschool program by trained staff,
- . Emphasis was bystander intervention and knowledge of dating violence and bullying
- . Operated at the individual/relationship levels of the social ecological model

## Youth Empowerment Zone Goal:

Increase the level of supportive connectedness within the local school environment and enhance students' connection to the wider community in order to increase the social cohesion among youth in Eastern Cranston.

Social cohesion is sometimes referred to as "the glue that keeps society together" and among youth it is characterized by a sense of inclusion and belonging, a sense of being supported and recognized by peers, having meaningful opportunities to contribute to and participate in the community, and a sense of trust and support in relationships with adults and authority figures.

Research suggests that neighborhoods and schools characterized by higher collective efficacy and increased student connection to school have decreases in violence and delinquency, while promoting engagement, attendance, and student motivation. This ties in with factors previously shown to be protective against youth involvement in risky behaviors.

## Youth Empowerment Zone Strategies:

- . Train and provide ongoing support to staff in the Positive Youth Development approach, prevention practices, and tools from the public health world
- . Foster and develop a strong youth leadership team who have meaningful decision making ability, including determining program vision and mission, as well as participating in staff hiring and evaluation
- . Engage youth in service learning projects that connect them back to their community and help change the common perception of teens as troublemakers
- . Help the youth plan and execute community events to showcase their projects and engage their neighbors, families, and local businesses
- . Help publicize the positive contributions of these youth through local news media and a trip to the RI Statehouse; and engage local political leaders, including members of the school committee, the Mayor of Cranston, and one of the RI Congressmen

## Challenges:

- . Pushback from administration and other adults around putting youth on hiring panels, employing high school aged staff, and generally trusting youth
- . Difficulty securing funding to expand the program to additional schools, or even to serve more students

## Successes:

- . Youth are trusted with program decisions and have even assisted in conducting instructor evaluations
- . Congressman Jim Langevin came to the school and spent over an hour listening to the youth talk about their projects and the program

## Key Facilitators of Success:

- . Strong community partnerships/relationships
- . Ongoing staff/organizational training based on needs identified during program evaluation
- . Organizational capacity for prevention work built through the original DELTA and DELTA FOCUS grants
- . Funder support and encouragement—The CDC pushed for work that would address the outer layers of the social ecology
- . Community immersion by the DELTA Coordinator and the afterschool Program Director, having a presence

## Tips for "Scaling Up":

- . Build cross-sector partnerships that emphasize common goals and shared outcomes
- . Help partners understand what is in it for them
- . "Show up" for the community & partner events
- . Be as clear as possible about your prevention goals and objectives
- . Develop a theory of change that connects your strategies to your outer-layer goals
- . Increase organizational and staff capacity at all levels around the social determinants of health
- . Train as many partners and staff as possible on the underlying public health concepts and strategies you plan to use, not just planners or management
- . Build systems for decision making and evaluation that involve the community in substantial ways



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