

Making Health Happen for Our Sons and Brothers

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In April 2013, leaders from The California Endowment (TCE) and more than two dozen philanthropic foundations pledged to form an alliance to strengthen the sector's investment in creating greater opportunities and wellness for black males and other males of color. (See joint statement <http://bmafunders.org/statement>). The article that follows describes TCE's efforts in improving outcomes for young males and lifts up lessons learned from early implementation efforts.

Recognizing the profound adverse impact of race and gender on the health of poor communities, TCE has concluded that building healthy communities cannot be achieved in any meaningful way unless the negative health trends experienced by young men and boys of color can be reversed. By investing in their futures, we invest in our own.

To operationalize this goal, TCE launched the Sons & Brothers program as a core part of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) strategy, which is aimed at simultaneously improving the health care system, school environments, and neighborhood conditions in select low-income communities in California. In August 2013, the board reinforced its commitment by approving a \$50 million investment in Sons & Brothers over the next seven years. This effort is aimed at transforming California's dominant narrative regarding California's boys and young men of color from "marginalized and off-track," to "connected and on-track."

THE VISION

Research identifies several key predictive markers or milestones associated with successful youth development: reading at grade level by the third grade, high school graduation, and postsecondary certification. The literature also confirms that all youth need access to the same basic supports: a supportive family, good mentors and role models, access to health care, good teachers, schools and neighborhoods that help children stay in school, and adults and service providers who can help them cope with adversity.

When youth overcome trauma and adversity, they become

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community assets, not liabilities. When boys attend school regularly, reach the third grade able to read, and complete their education without getting expelled or involved in the justice system, we put them on a sure path to becoming healthy men. And when youth develop as leaders, individual transformation leads to community transformation.

SONS & BROTHERS

The Vision:

- *Boys Are Healthy and Safe:* Boys are healed from trauma and build social emotional health to remain resilient and hopeful in the face of adversity.
- *Boys Succeed in School:* Boys are connected to school, family, and trusted adults; health; and other community supports.
- *Boys Become Leaders:* Youth are prepared for success and leadership for personal and community transformation.

The Goals:

- Support development of 1,000 youth leaders throughout California.
- Improve school attendance by 30 percent in targeted schools.
- Halve the number of students suspended, using proven common sense discipline strategies that keep kids in school.
- Train all California school police officers on youth development and trauma.
- Implement restorative justice and diversionary programs in communities so that kids and community members come together to resolve conflicts, and kids stay out of juvenile hall.
- Enroll all eligible children and young men in health coverage to support their physical and mental health.

EARLY LESSONS

- **Norms Change** – To effect and maintain policy change, the public norm around an issue must be conducive to the policies that are being advanced. In the case of boys of color, public norms can be deeply entrenched in concepts that are deficit, not asset-based. We recognize that to promote policies that are smarter and better for boys of color (and others), we must first change public attitudes to embrace and support these young men. We call our work Health Happens Here to depict in fresh, plain language the concept of social determinants of health. We call our work on boys of color Health Happens with all our Sons & Brothers to communicate our shared destiny and relationships to each other. A major aspect of this work seeks to change the conversation about who boys and young men are and what they contribute to society and to California.
- **Equity and Fairness** – Improving the health of boys and young men of color is one of the original outcomes articulated in the BHC strategy. This has been key in mobilizing internal resources and in engaging external partners. In fact, the focus on young males has become a leading indicator of our health equity work. We now ask questions such as: Are we engaging boys of color in our youth engagement efforts? Are our outreach and enrollment efforts reaching boys and men? Are strategies having positive effects on boys, as well as girls?
- **Shared Ownership** – Our Sons & Brothers work is a cross-cutting priority across all TCE programs, instead of a separate initiative, to avoid it being marginalized or ended prematurely. We wanted this work to be a core part of the 10-year BHC strategy, although the decision embedded a challenging population focus within a broader strategy focused on policy, systems, and environmental change efforts. We had not done this before, but we strongly believe it was the right call because it positions the work to be more sustainable over time. The work is broadly shared.
- **Measurement: What Is Counted Gets Done** – We have identified explicit outcomes and indicators related to Sons & Brothers within each of TCE’s relevant program areas—Prevention, Schools, Neighborhoods—to track progress and hold ourselves accountable to the goals we have established. For example, our Affordable Care Act outreach and enrollment efforts will include a focus on males. Our positive school discipline and community safety efforts will also focus on young males. Similarly, our youth engagement and communications efforts work to change the narrative about youth of color.
- **Dedicated Resources Leverage Broader Investments** – A key challenge in implementing an embedded—but targeted—strategy is that it can get lost in the shuffle. We have addressed this by dedicating Sons & Brothers resources across the foundation. This has functioned as a catalyst that influences the broader program areas.
- **Trauma and Healing** – TCE’s focus on health issues affecting young men of color has lifted up the significant role that trauma, healing, and culture play in the

transformation of young people and their families and communities. Trauma and chronic adversity are everyday circumstances in many low-income, communities of color. Countless children experience violence, neglect, and poverty on a continuous basis—with significant implications for their development, behavior, and long-term health. When left unaddressed, these experiences become significant barriers to wellness. TCE aims to expand the integration of trauma- and healing-informed approaches within youth and family service delivery systems through applied research, development of promising models, and policy and systems change strategies.

- **Youth Engagement** – A critical component of the Sons & Brothers work is youth engagement and leadership, which includes several components: local youth engagement activities in BHC sites; a Sons & Brothers summer camp; a youth leadership and advocacy training program; and an annual youth advocacy day in Sacramento. We achieve three important goals by investing in a robust youth engagement program:
 - We contribute to positive youth development and health of young people who are engaged in our youth engagement and leadership activities.
 - Through youth organizing and advocacy we build policymaker support for a range of building healthy communities goals.
 - By engaging youth we contribute to changing the narrative and demonstrate that young men of color are assets and leaders for California’s future.
- **Broad-Based Leadership** – Broad internal leadership at TCE has been one of the most important factors contributing to the success of the Sons & Brothers work. CEO Dr. Robert Ross has been directly engaged in the effort, taking a three-month study leave to interview dozens of leaders around the country, then working with senior program staff to translate his insights into the strategy adopted by the board. In addition to his leadership, it was critical to broaden leadership and ownership of the Sons & Brothers work at the staff level. There is now a team of program staff with direct responsibility and leadership for executing the strategy. We believe this cross-departmental collaboration and leadership can position this work with more sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The lessons above are insights about how TCE—as an organization—has worked internally to integrate, implement, and manage the Sons & Brothers work. We encourage others to join us and the growing number of foundations committed to improving the health and well-being of all our sons and brothers.

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VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Osula Rushing at 202.452.8331 or orushing@gih.org.