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The Boys and Men of Color Framework: A Model for Community and Systems Change

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Keywords: Boys and men of color, policy, advocacy, health disparities, trauma informed practice

Key Points

- For too long, many African American, Latino, Native, and Asian boys and young men have been shunted into failing schools and pushed out of them for minor infractions, incarcerated in massive numbers, suffered from unaddressed health needs, died young, or entered adulthood without prospects to earn a livelihood.
- In response to this crisis, an evolving body of work rooted in place has emerged to reverse persistent patterns of racial discrimination, build strong communities, and create pathways to opportunity by catalyzing changes in local and state systems that have the greatest impact on young males of color.
- The experiences of PolicyLink and other organizations provide important lessons about the elements of successful efforts on behalf of boys and men of color. This article describes four key elements, shares how they are driving transformative efforts on the ground, and includes reflections on the complexities and challenges involved in building these practices. It also examines the role of the philanthropic community in providing strategic support to advance promising approaches.
- Within the dynamic context of a growing movement, the local efforts and philanthropic contributions highlighted in this article illustrate that meaningful change is possible when critical ingredients come together.

Introduction

Residents and leaders in communities across the nation are spearheading efforts to dis-mantle the barriers facing young men of color and help them reach their full potential. These efforts build on traditional strategies emphasizing programs and services, but also go well beyond, to focus on the systems and policies that define and constrain the environments of boys and men of color. Through pioneering approaches that work across systems and authentically engage boys and men of color themselves, the field is catalyzing meaningful changes in practice and policy to improve individual, family, and community life.

For too long, many black, Latino, Native, and Asian boys and young men have fallen through the cracks. They've been shunted into failing schools, pushed out for minor infractions, and incarcerated in massive numbers. Too many have suffered from unaddressed health needs, died young, or entered adulthood without prospects to earn a livelihood.

In response to this crisis, an evolving body of work rooted in place has emerged. It reflects an understanding that all children's futures are connected to the contexts in which they live. Children need healthy, supportive, and economically secure families. Children and families thrive when they live in communities with ample economic and social opportunities, including services, resources, and support networks.

This new generation of place-based initiatives seeks to build coordinated supports for children and families, from cradle to college and career, in a specific neighborhood or catchment area. Initiatives focus on the particularities of boys and men of color, including their history, cultural identity, the communities they live in, and the effects of institutionalized racism. Different from individual bias, institutionalized racism refers to policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor or chronically disadvantage a racial group (Aspen Institute, n.d.). The work aims to unravel the web of laws, regulations, and practices that have historically blocked boys and men of color and their families from living in opportunity-rich neighborhoods, attending good schools, and fully participating in economic life through secure and productive jobs.

Although today's laws prohibit many overtly discriminatory policies, persistent racial segregation – combined with the concentration of poverty in disinvested urban neighborhoods, older suburbs, and rural communities – has stripped countless communities of wealth, jobs, businesses, and other resources that boys and men of color and their families need to succeed. Moreover, communities face persistent issues of institutionalized racism, implicit bias, and disproportionate impacts from policies.

The boys and men of color field is working to reverse these patterns, build strong communities, and create pathways to opportunity by catalyzing changes in local and state systems that have the greatest impact on young males of color, including public schools, juvenile justice, health care, and workforce development. Efforts hone in on critical policy levers – for example, school discipline policies that disproportionately target boys of color for suspension and referral to law enforcement, or efforts to develop self-esteem, focused job training, or targeted hire policies and programs. Embedded in most of these efforts is the leadership and voices of boys and men of color in the development, advocacy for, and the implementation of these change agendas. Achieving impact requires a particular set of approaches,

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capacities, and competencies that boys and men of color initiatives are developing and mastering.

PolicyLink plays a central role in this field through the California Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, as a consultant to foundations in the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, and as a technical assistance partner to My Brother's Keeper, the White House initiative. The experiences of PolicyLink and other

To achieve collective impact, initiatives must have a broad enough scope to drive changes in a wide array of services, supports, and opportunities (Kania & Kramer, 2011). A single point of emphasis – for example, improving third-grade reading levels – while critically important, cannot in isolation transform life outcomes across a population. Similarly focusing on a single system, such as reforming juvenile justice policy and practice, does not by itself address the coexisting barriers to positive outcomes.

organizations provide important lessons about the elements of successful efforts on behalf of boys and men of color. This article describes four key elements:

1. A comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach, working across issues and systems that impact boys and men of color from cradle to career, is essential.
2. Local and state intermediaries serve as essential hubs for complex, long-term initiatives and to increase capacity and policy impact.
3. Personal healing and culturally relevant trauma-informed practices can enhance individual and system outcomes.
4. The capacity to develop, implement, and win policy reforms – and engage young men and boys of color in the process – is critical for authentic and effective change.

The following sections explore these four success elements, share how they are driving transformative efforts on the ground, and include our reflections from the field about the complexities and challenges involved in building these practices. We also examine the role of the philanthropic community in providing strategic support to advance promising approaches.

Lesson No. 1: A Multidisciplinary Approach Is Essential

In its report to the White House, the My Brother's Keeper Task Force (2014) outlined the myriad challenges across multiple domains that boys and men of color face on the path to building stable, healthy, and productive lives. They are more likely to grow up in poverty, live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, and go to under-resourced and poorly performing schools. In their neighborhoods they find few, if any, supports, and face bias in how they are treated on the street, in retail stores, and by law enforcement. In schools and in courts, boys and young men of color are again subject to implicit and actual bias, often receive harsher penalties than their white peers for the same infractions, and are least likely to be given a second chance. All these circumstances combine to disproportionately limit life outcomes in health, education, and employment (Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2013).

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A multidisciplinary approach spans multiple programs, systems, and levels of practice along a cradle-to-career continuum. The Young Men's Initiative (YMI) in New York City, for example, has worked across systems and issues since its inception in 2010 under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Informed by a data-driven, "innovation delivery" focus, the YMI set out to reduce inequities in adult success with a specific emphasis on young black and Latino males. The YMI encompasses the work of 20 city agencies and more than 200 community-based organizations.

The CUNY Fatherhood Academy, developed by the YMI within the City University of New York, illustrates the initiative's broad, multilayered approach. The academy works to strengthen families by promoting responsible fatherhood and economic stability through education, employment, and personal-development workshops. Alongside this programmatic work, the YMI works with city agencies to make their systems and practices more "father friendly." This emphasis on supporting fathers as an entry point to strengthening families has positive effects on both ends of the cradle-to-career continuum. Fathers are more likely to successfully enter into stable, family-sustaining jobs with ladders to a career, and their children benefit from the resulting educational and economic success.

The initiative also is piloting innovative school-based approaches to increase college and career readiness for black and Latino young men. The YMI's Expanded Success Initiative invests in 40 New York City schools with track records for graduating these men and helps them improve college readiness. The pilot is honing interventions in the areas of academics, youth development, a college-focused school culture, and culturally relevant education. While evaluation of the effort is ongoing, measures in the third year of the pilot show an increase in black and Latino male students who are meeting their credit benchmarks as they move into their junior year of high school.

Finally, the YMI has helped effect significant improvements in the juvenile justice system, one

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of the key institutions affecting boys and men of color. An overhaul of the city's Department of Probation changed the approach to client supervision, augmented services, and established decentralized probation – all to prioritize community involvement. Probation officers are tasked with connecting clients to nearby partner organizations to further their education, assist with job training and placement, address health and mental health needs, and strengthen their family and neighborhood. While comprehensive organizational change of this sort takes time and involves staff developing and embracing new understandings of their roles, initial evidence suggests that clients ages 16-24 who are referred to decentralized probation are less likely to be

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Under the leadership of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, the YMI continues to refine its multidisciplinary, cradle-to-career focus in alignment with the My Brother's Keeper initiative. The YMI also is building on its own experience to better target promising approaches, anchoring its programs more strongly in six priority communities that drive a substantial portion of the disparate outcomes for the city's young men of color. In all these places, the initiative is engaging communities to collaboratively develop solutions that draw on existing capacities, redirect resources, and encourage systems and policy change.

Reflections

The breadth and timing of the Young Men's Initiative played a key role in elevating the visibility of boys and men of color issues in New York City and on the national stage. Its launch was instrumental in expanding and consolidating major efforts already underway (reorganization

of the Department of Probation, for example); marshaling political and financial support for their continued implementation; and ensuring that cutting-edge, evidence-based practice guided large-scale institutional-change efforts.

Strong support from the mayor and accountability both from and to city agency managers gave the YMI unprecedented capacity to focus resources and drive change. At the same time, the first phase of work was accompanied by differing views about emphasis and priorities common to many large-scale efforts. Themes that surfaced in New York and continue to resonate throughout the field include the interplay between devising new programs versus reforming larger systems, between "outside" advocacy and "inside" change, between pursuing a citywide scope and geographically targeting resources, and among the most critical areas of emphasis across the cradle-to-career continuum. There are leadership and political dynamics in play as well in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. These discussions continue to inform and shape the YMI and other initiatives working to improve outcomes among boys and men of color.

Philanthropic Support for Cross-Cutting Efforts

Philanthropic collaborations are not the norm. Getting foundations to join together, to agree on shared results, and to smooth the process of securing and reporting on funding is a work in progress. Yet, the best place-based efforts have diverse portfolios to support the multidisciplinary and cross-cutting nature of this field. Many are pushing this forward and there is evident progress, but the newness of collaboration has added dimensions to the work that have required additional attention and engagement at all levels, from presidents to program officers.

At the center of this work, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) has a history of supporting efforts that reflect a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach. The OSF invested \$30 million in the YMI, funding innovative programs, providing flexible dollars to leverage public and private resources, and supporting key systems and policy reforms. Earlier, through the Campaign for

Black Male Achievement, the OSF seeded efforts to improve outcomes for boys and men of color for more than six years and provided strategic support for the field through capacity building, network building, and strategic communications. It was a central player in the YMI philanthropic collaborations and was deeply involved in national efforts, as well. More than 40 foundations, including The California Endowment and the Skillman Foundation, have brought their leadership and collaborative commitments to efforts for boys and men of color at the local, state, and national levels – including the Executive Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, a national philanthropic network committed to evaluating promising approaches, advocating for effective public policy and systems change, and investing in young men of color.

Lesson No. 2: Local and State Intermediaries Are Essential Hubs

Intermediaries provide backbone and infrastructure to anchor community change efforts. Their key roles include project management, data management, and facilitation, and involve leadership skills that include the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders (Kania & Kramer, 2011). In efforts focused on boys and men of color, intermediaries also need to bring a point of view and experience focusing on equity outcomes. The evolution and impact of work in California on issues of boys and men of color illustrate the central role that intermediaries play in helping these initiatives achieve policy and systems change at the local and state levels.

The Urban Strategies Council, a long-standing community-building intermediary, serves as the regional convener and coordinator for the Oakland-Alameda County Alliance for Boys and Men of Color. Established in 2011, the alliance consists of leaders of public systems and community partners working on programs, practices, and policies; the council assists them with research,

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policy, innovation, and advocacy. The council regularly convenes these leadership groups independently, providing a place to learn, discuss challenges and opportunities, and plan for advancing shared objectives. Periodically, the council brings both groups together to align efforts in a way that fosters partnership between community and systems.

Since 2010, suspensions have decreased by 30 percent for black students in the district and 35 percent for students overall. Under the leadership of local advocates in the Bay Area chapter of the Dignity in Schools Campaign, the district recently enacted a policy to expand these supports and eliminate suspensions and expulsions for defiance.

The council has engaged systems leaders in planning and implementation across city and county agencies to improve outcomes for boys and men of color. The Oakland Unified School District, for example, is realigning its practices to address the disproportionately harsh discipline received by black male students. The district entered into a voluntary agreement with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and has reduced “defiance” as a basis for suspension, rejected zero-tolerance policies, adopted restorative-justice principles, and introduced intervention and support strategies to teach and reinforce schoolwide behavioral expectations. Since 2010, suspensions have decreased by 30 percent for black students in the district and 35 percent for students overall. Under the leadership of local advocates in the Bay Area chapter of the Dignity in Schools Campaign, the district recently enacted a policy to expand these supports and eliminate suspensions and expulsions for defiance.

In Alameda County, the Health Care Services Agency is leveraging its procurement power to provide opportunities for young men of color. The private contractors that provide emergency medical services have agreed to hire qualified

graduates of the county’s Emergency Medical Services Corps, which draws from youth involved in the juvenile justice system. This enables the health care agency to offer youth a strong incentive to complete the program – a guarantee of a job that pays a good wage upon graduation and state certification.

By supporting, strengthening, and amplifying the work of local leaders, the Urban Strategies Council illustrates the complex functions that define backbone organizations. Undergirding its effectiveness are the council’s orientation in racial equity, community building, and anti-poverty work; the trust it has built over years of working within and among local communities of color; and its interdisciplinary expertise.

The council was also a partner in forming the California Alliance for Boys and Men of Color as a mechanism to maximize coordination and alignment between local and state policy campaigns. As a participant in policy work groups in health, education, jobs, and community safety and justice, the council has informed the alliance’s state policy agenda in critical ways. The council’s prominent role facilitated the dramatic growth of and participation within the Oakland-Alameda County Alliance, enabling it to leverage and access research, policy, and convening capacity; deep issue expertise; and long-standing relationships with decision-makers and other related networks in the region.

PolicyLink serves as intermediary for the California statewide alliance. It collaborates with local alliances throughout the state to bring together a critical mass of youth and other community leaders – with their authentic voice, experience, and methods – to advocate for state policy change. PolicyLink manages, facilitates, and supports all aspects of the statewide network’s functions, including education with policy and systems leaders and coordination with state and local partners. Over the last four years, the statewide alliance has contributed to more than 30 bills being signed into California law, the passage of two resolutions, and budget-policy advocacy on prison reform, workforce training, restorative practices in

schools, and education finance. A broad, dedicated engagement strategy is a critical element of success. In addition to its organizational and systems partners, the alliance engages with youth leaders statewide, learning about their lives and experiences to authentically craft policy agendas. The alliance works directly with these young leaders, educating them about the policy process and training them to engage with policymakers, tell their stories, and advocate for policy and system changes. This year, almost 300 youth of color went to Sacramento to help policymakers understand the need for change. These accomplishments would not be possible without the dedicated support of strong backbone institutions, each with a point of view and a commitment and experience on a range of equity issues.

Reflections

Intermediaries' capacity to sustain collaboration and effect policy change involves qualities that are not always superficially apparent. Nuanced leadership and authentic access to constituencies of color can make or break an equity-focused initiative. Mediating among organizations representing historically marginalized constituencies, and ensuring that all are able to grow their capacity and implement their common agenda, requires operating from a place of deep understanding, creativity, and humility. It requires a flexible definition of leadership that at times is positioning others for visibility and impact, other times coaching or strategizing, and still others stepping out in front to pull the field forward. All of this must be wrapped together with a range of personal attributes in building and sustaining relationships across a range of differences: racial, economic, ethnic, issue, geo-graphic. This requires institutional and individual leadership qualities and capacities. The importance of these attributes may only become clear when their absence causes a promising effort to falter or fail, leaving bitterness, broken trust, and discouragement in its wake.

In addition, intermediaries rely on a wide range of content expertise, communication skills, and proficiency with technology to play their roles effectively. No single organization can specialize in every discipline that is needed to advance every

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aspect of a given initiative. Intermediaries need to be mindful of where they may lack the depth of knowledge to guide a particular component of work and be proactive about bringing in additional expertise.

Philanthropic Support for Intermediaries

As a funder and anchor partner, The California Endowment (TCE) plays a critical role in boys and men of color work. Its support for local and statewide intermediary organizations and networks has helped catalyze policy and systems change across the state. This infrastructure-building aspect of TCE's work addresses long-

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term systemic challenges, enhancing leadership development and organizational capacity on the ground. TCE's commitment and approach enables individual leaders and local alliances to learn from one another and unite in support of common goals. Finally, TCE is deeply involved with work in specific communities and in connecting that work to a coordinated policy agenda locally and statewide.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) also provides key support to the backbone organizations that add essential capacity to boys and men of color efforts, including NOLA for Life, launched in 2012 by New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu in response to that city's decadelong struggle with one of the highest homicide rates in the country. In 2014, New Orleans saw its murder rate decline for the third straight year, with homicides at a 43-year low. Housed in the mayor's

office, NOLA for Life is a comprehensive strategy that invests in violence intervention and prevention, community engagement in rebuilding neighborhoods, social and behavioral supports, workforce training and jobs, out-of-school activities, and reform of the New Orleans Police Department.

With RWJF's support, the city and the Greater New Orleans Foundation partnered in 2014 to create the NOLA for Life Services Collaborative – a cohort of 20 social service organizations and community partners – to provide a continuum of support that addresses the needs of high-risk youth and young adults. Over six months, the collaborative developed resources, tools, standards, performance measures, and a universal client-tracking system to create a successful continuum of care. The final phase of the RWJF grant is a 12-month pilot project that will test these approaches and tools. It will bring together youth-serving organizations providing case management, alternative education, mental health services, family services, vocational training and placement, mentoring, and substance-abuse counseling to help them integrate evidence-based assessment tools and case-management standards into their work — all with the goal of improving outcomes for boys and men of color.

Lesson No. 3: Personal Healing and Culturally Relevant Trauma-Informed Practices Can Enhance Outcomes

Young men of color are disproportionately affected by various forms of trauma and adversity: poverty, incarceration, lack of access to health care, marginalization, low social status (Bloom, et al., 2009). In tandem with other strategies discussed in this article, spiritual healing and culturally relevant trauma-informed practices support the growth, development, and capacity to realize opportunities for boys and men of color. These approaches recognize that many mental health and concurrent chronic health conditions are the residual effects of individual trauma and iterative levels of community trauma, including regular exposure to violence (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.). At the core of these approaches lies the funda-

mental belief that the health and well-being of young men of color is dependent on the rootedness of their lives in their own cultural values and practices. Healing is thus contingent upon restoring broken connections with cultural identity – particularly for black and Latino communities in the U.S., as they have been significantly fragmented (Bloom, et al., 2009).

Spiritual healing and culturally relevant trauma-informed approaches can spark lasting change for individual men, stabilizing their lives and putting them on the pathway toward educational and career success. At the same time, these practices have the power to change relationships between these men and the institutions with which they interact, remaking systems to be more effective and responsive and enabling boys and men of color to better use the tools and services they provide.

In many communities around the country, community organizers, service providers, educators, activists, and policymakers have responded to their heightened awareness of the high prevalence of trauma among children, youth, and adults in highly impacted communities by developing healing strategies that draw on culturally based knowledge, ritual, and practice. This accompanies an increasing appreciation and understanding of the importance of healing strategies that have been developed within communities that have been subjected to structural violence and institutional racism and inequality. Using this framework as a point of departure is critically important for developing practices and strategies that are culturally relevant, appropriate, and effective. Some of the most effective strategies and programs are culturally based programs in African American and Latino communities that utilize community members, values, rituals, and practices to reconnect psychologically injured members of the community. Practices such as La Cultura Cura promote psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing and renewal through a reconnection to community (National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, 2012; Prevention Institute, 2015).

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Focusing on assets and cultural frameworks that promote healing and positive male development can be an especially powerful tool for young men of color (Ginwright, 2010). The San Joaquin County Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (SJC Alliance) is a collaborative of community and system leaders working to connect policy and practice to the issues underlying the school-to-prison pipeline. Efforts focus on the education and juvenile justice systems at the local (Stockton), county (San Joaquin), and state (California) levels. Spiritual healing – the process of restoring a person’s humanity – and reciprocity frame and guide all parts of the work of the SJC Alliance.

This framework is used by the alliance as:

- a basis for relationship- and trust-building among boys and men of color, between them

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and the community, among and between people who work in and lead public systems that impact boys and men of color, and within the community at large;

- the basis for the self-reclamation of boys and men of color, to help reconnect to an empowering cultural and ancestral heritage, encourage them to be agents of their own destiny and to have the skills and confidence to influence the world around them, and as a pathway to healthy development, restoration, and lifelong well-being; and
- an alternative cultural and spiritual framework to a primarily programmatic approach to poverty alleviation.

The SJC Alliance uses healing-informed organizing strategies to build individual leadership skills and commitment and to gain buy-in from systems leaders to make policy and systems change. Part of its work includes healing circles that build a sense of personal transformation and community connections. The value proposition is that, in the main, people within youth-serving systems – teachers, principals, legislators, police officers – have good intentions and are scarred by the way they interact with the community. They, too, need healing to become champions of a changed relationship between the systems in which they work and the youth they serve.

This healing-informed approach has led SJC Alliance to key policy and practice wins. In 2011,

the Stockton Unified School District agreed to stop using the category of “willful defiance” in its discipline practices. This category was ill defined, used as grounds to suspend and expel students for a broad range of misconduct, and applied disproportionately to boys of color. With philanthropic support, the school district is piloting the use of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, an evidence-based model that improves supports for students whose behaviors require more specialized assistance and that maximizes academic engagement of all students.

The focus on healing and trauma-informed approaches has allowed the SJC Alliance to reclaim scores of young people and elders who have been traumatized by the conditions in the communities the alliance is working to change. Through culturally informed healing practices, members of the network have developed a deep sense of identity and purpose, grown stronger bonds with one another and with systems leaders, and have successfully advocated for change.

Reflections

The process of healing is not an easy one; it requires the labor of continuous community engagement and introspection toward the goals of shifting power and building trust. When applying healing practices such as circles in a particular setting, such as a school, it is important to recognize that if not done well these practices may be more harmful than helpful. Facilitation that is not culturally and contextually appropriate may inadvertently lead to miscommunication and, at worst, the revictimization and retraumatization of participants. Left unchecked, power imbalances can leave victims feeling vulnerable, shamed, and threatened. Furthermore, facilitation that is too permissive may reinforce self-destructive behaviors rather than encouraging new healing ones (McCold & Wachtel, 2003).

In a reflection on the precautions that must be taken in implementing healing and trauma-informed approaches, Alejandra Gutierrez, program manager at Fathers & Families of San Joaquin, writes:

Indigenous traditions teach us that healing circles create a space that is sacred and equipped for healing. Healing is a lifelong journey that is continuous, but can begin by simply creating the space and environment that will allow individuals to verbally and spiritually bring out the pain and hardships while gaining support from the circle keeper.

When introducing individuals and families who have been exposed to traumatic experiences to this cultural approach of healing, it is important to keep in mind that wounds will open. If these wounds are not attended to and treated, the individual is at risk of more harm and pain by not understanding how to deal with the emotions that have been stirred. Closure after each healing circle is essential to ensuring that the individual leaves the circle lighter, closer to the healing they need, and that they return and continue to engage in these healing practices.

La Cultura Cura, or “culture cures,” teaches us the cultural traditions that create this sacred space. For closure, ancestral medicines such as sage and copal “tree sap” are used for “smudging.” Smudging is a tradition used to spiritually and physically remove negative energy so the individual leaves the circle feeling protected and healed. Without such ancestral tools, healing circles may lack the most basic, ancient elements that offer the individual what they truly need to heal.

Who heals the healer? Without such practices used by the circle keepers themselves, the circle keeper may also be vulnerable to retraumatization and ineffectiveness. We often ask the question, Who heals the healer? because we must embark on our journey of healing before supporting other’s journey of healing. We know this because when one heals we all heal ... therefore, we must ALL support each other’s healing to reach overall community healing (Personal communication, July 21, 2015).

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Philanthropic Support for Healing and Trauma-Informed Practices

The Sierra Health Foundation plays a central role in supporting the San Joaquin County Alliance for Boys and Men of Color through its San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. The fund strengthens the capacity of communities and organizations in the San Joaquin Valley to improve health and well-being by advancing programs and policy changes that promote community health and health equity for all (Sierra Health Foundation Center for Health Program Management, n.d.). Specific grants to Fathers & Families of San Joaquin have supported its work to address disparities in life and health outcomes for people of color in San Joaquin County by training youth in community organizing and mobilizing to advocate for policy and systems change (Sierra Health Foundation Center for Health Program Management, 2015).

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is providing key support for healing approaches through its America Healing initiative. It seeks to address the pain and suffering experienced over generations as a result of structural privilege and social injustice. The initiative supports organizations undertaking an explicit approach to healing, both within

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communities and individuals, as a step to close achievement gaps and eliminate racial disparities. Kellogg supports efforts in California that are part of the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and is a member of the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color.

Lesson No. 4: Building Capacity for Policy and Systems Change Is Critical

Initiatives for boys and men of color are focusing on systems change as an intentional process to shift and realign institutional practice. Initiatives work to change statutes, regulations, executive orders, and agency practices, and to develop new ones, shifting resources and power to improve outcomes for boys and men of color. These focused approaches aim for population-level results to bring changes at the needed scope and scale (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

In Colorado, the End the School-to-Jail Track campaign provides a powerful illustration of a successful effort to change systems and policies. The campaign was formed to end zero tolerance and racial profiling in school discipline, put a stop to the criminalization of youth behavior through school policing, and implement positive policies involving alternative school-discipline practices. A community organization, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos (PJU), has led this campaign for more than

a decade. Moving from local to state and back again as needed to reach its goals, the campaign has achieved significant policy impacts:

- In 2006, the campaign collaborated with Denver Public Schools to launch one of the country's first systematic attempts to implement alternatives to traditional punitive, discriminatory, and criminalizing school discipline, with a five-year grant from the Colorado Department of Education.
- In 2008, Denver Public Schools adopted a school discipline code with policies that focus on keeping students in school by decreasing suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals, and by introducing practices based on prevention and re-storative justice.
- In 2012, Colorado passed Senate Bill 46, Safe Schools Through Smart Discipline, requiring every school district to implement "proportionate" discipline that reduces the number of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement.
- Districts also must implement prevention strategies, restorative justice, peer mediation, counseling, and other approaches to minimize student exposure to the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The state mandated first-of-its-kind data collection on the interaction among schools, law enforcement, and the justice system, and provides enhanced training for school resource officers.

A key to success has been the involvement of the most affected constituencies – parents and youth of color attending public schools – to drive the campaign. Padres & Jóvenes Unidos worked extensively to engage parent and student supporters through parent groups, after-school activities, "Know Your Rights" workshops, and other grassroots strategies. Parent and student leaders collected stories in juvenile courts on the harsh impact of zero-tolerance policies and used these stories for policy advocacy. The PJU alliances with organizations representing foster youth, LGBTQ youth, disability-rights advocates, and juvenile

defenders, in addition to partnering with public agencies, elected officials, and organized labor.

As a result of this engagement capacity, students of color in the Denver Public Schools system served as primary leaders of the campaign. Elevating the voice of the boys most affected by the school-to-prison pipeline generated buy-in and ownership within Denver's Latino and African American communities. Student leaders presented compelling, resonant testimony to the Denver Public Schools board and in state Senate hearings. Student leaders also sat at the policy table, debating and negotiating their interests with policy leaders.

Since Denver's adoption of the new school discipline code, suspension and expulsion rates have decreased districtwide by 54 percent to 60 percent; since 2003-2004, when the campaign began, law enforcement referrals have dropped by 57 percent (Padres & Jóvenes Unidos & Advancement Project, n.d.). The state has had a 36 percent drop in expulsions, a 17 percent decrease in suspensions, and a 23 percent drop in law enforcement referrals since the law was passed in 2012 (Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, 2015).

To ensure that the law is implemented according to the original intent, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos has launched a statewide network of community, advocacy, agency, and government stakeholders to continue to press for an end to racial discrimination and harsh discipline in Colorado public schools.

Reflections

Building the authentic engagement of young people is a powerful strategy for driving policy change, but developing this capacity is labor- and time-intensive. It involves far more than simply organizing training events, for example; it involves building a culture of advocacy and engagement in affected communities – working with young people over time to embed an understanding of government, systems, bias, and how change and reform happen. Equally important is instilling the belief in youth themselves that change is possible

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and that they are capable of being leaders to achieve change.

Depending on the community, the level of readiness to take action may vary dramatically among stakeholders. Building capacity where there are opportunities for growth and ensuring shared ownership of a policy- and systems-reform agenda are important to the success of any place-based effort advancing change for boys and men of color. Growing shared ownership and capacity for action requires skill, staying power, and resources.

Philanthropic Support for Building Capacity for Policy and Systems Change

Atlantic Philanthropies provides key support for diverse efforts aimed at reforming zero-tolerance school-discipline policies and eliminating racial disparities in suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in schools. Through its participation in the Just and Fair Schools Fund, a funding collaborative, Atlantic Philanthropies invests in local and

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statewide public-policy campaigns throughout the country to accelerate the reversal of zero-tolerance policies. The collaborative has invested in the work of Padres & Jóvenes Unidos. In addition to its support for campaigns to mobilize parents, students, and legal advocates to demand reform to school discipline, Atlantic Philanthropies also invests in organizations that focus on strengthening federal mandates and incentives for reform, building influential champions, and enhancing research, knowledge, and capacity to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline.

Conclusion

According to the National Population Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), young men of color represent nearly half (48 percent) of males under 18 and will reach the majority by 2019. Among this age group, the fastest growing populations are mixed race, Latino, and Asian American and Pacific Islanders. The combined average growth rate for men of color is 4.3 percent, compared to a projected decline of 3.1 percent for white men. Young men of color will shape the vitality, prosperity, and resilience of our nation throughout the 21st century. Realizing our country's full potential requires transforming how our institutions and systems engage and support this growing and vulnerable population.

The boys and men of color field is forging a set of approaches that address both immediate needs and the larger policy and systems context of these young men's lives. While still evolving, these are yielding valuable lessons that can guide other communities, advocates, funders, and policymakers as they take on the challenge of ensuring that boys and men of color reach their full potential.

This article shares core lessons emerging from this work. First, to overcome the complex web of challenges that constrain these young men's life chances, a comprehensive approach that works across issues and systems from cradle to career is essential for success. Second, the engagement of trusted, high-performing intermediaries increases the capacity and reach of local initiatives and enhances policy impact. Third, the history of trauma endured by people and communities of color makes culturally relevant, healing-informed practice indispensable for improving outcomes. Fourth, the capacity to launch, build support for, and win policy campaigns in multiple arenas – with authentic engagement and participation of boys, young men, and men of color – is critical to long-term change.

Nationally, the My Brother's Keeper initiative has galvanized nearly 240 communities in 46 states to develop comprehensive strategies that support and expand opportunities for boys and young men of color. They are guided by a focus on six critical milestones along the life course:

1. entering school ready to learn,
2. reading at grade level by third grade,
3. graduating from high school ready for college and career,
4. completing postsecondary training or education,
5. successfully entering the workforce, and
6. reducing violence and providing a second chance.

The milestones underscore how early childhood education influences high school outcomes, which in turn influence college and career readiness. They help diverse stake-holders understand how educational and career roadblocks can profoundly affect a young man's life chances, and they outline a pathway forward. The final milestone underscores the belief that every life matters, and by preventing violence, supporting victims, and ensuring second chances for former offenders, we can create communities where boys and men of color thrive.

By raising the visibility of boys and men of color and the urgency of addressing the issues impacting their lives, this national endeavor is aligning with hybrid approaches unfolding in communities and states to create a watershed moment for boys and men of color and for a field focused on their lives and livelihood. Within this dynamic context of a growing movement, the local efforts highlighted in this article illustrate that meaningful change is possible when critical ingredients come together.

The philanthropic community has long worked to reduce barriers and enhance opportunities for boys and men of color and is helping to seed, replicate, and scale up solutions. Philanthropy can play a key role in addressing the larger policy and systems context of young men's lives by building the capacity of efforts like those highlighted in this article and helping them to expand their scope and impact.

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