m1 DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Community Connections, Belonging, and Safety

Strong community connections and belonging are associated with multiple beneficial outcomes, including improved mental health, reduced substance use, reduced risk taking and behavior concerns, increased participation in extracurricular activities, and improved overall well-being (An & Western, 2019; Butler et al., 2012; Rejaän et al., 2022; Van Gundy et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, there are multiple benefits associated with high levels of community safety, including promoting play and other types of physical activity and recreation, improved physical and mental health, and increased life satisfaction (Butler et al., 2012; Christian et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2014). Lastly, ensuring youth have safe pedestrian modes of travel to get to and from school can positively impact students' physical activity and reduce injuries (McDonald et al., 2014; Muennig et al., 2014; Stewart et al., 2014). For the most current local data on the percentage of students reporting they feel safe at school and feel safe going to and from school, please visit MDH's interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data](www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html) (www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

There are multiple ways communities can promote neighborhood connections and cohesion and community safety.

Relevant indicator(s):

■ Neighborhood connectedness or cohesion

■ Neighborhood safety

■ Sense of safety going to and from school

Strategies for strengthening connections between youth and caring adults can also promote community connections and belonging.

Effective strategies

■ **Community centers, events, programming, and volunteer opportunities.** These activities and spaces can increase social interaction and cohesion and promote a sense of community belonging and ownership (Colistra et al., 2019; Ohmer, 2007). Additionally, they can provide opportunities to learn new skills (e.g., community education classes) and address community concerns (e.g., volunteer tutors; Smith et al., 2021; Stevenson, 2022). Some activities are designed specifically to serve certain populations, such as community activities aimed at reducing isolation among older adults or helping new immigrants acclimate to life in the U.S. (U.N. Refugee Agency, n.d.; Zhang et al., 2022).

■ **Neighborhood associations** to bring together private residents, business owners, and government representatives to promote collaboration, identify and address neighborhood concerns, and increase civic engagement (Ruef & Kwon, 2016).

- **Addressing crime strategically** by prioritizing specific types of behavior, focusing on high-crime locations, understanding the underlying behavior and context in which the crime is committed, ensuring social services are available to address contributing factors, clearly and consistently communicating with community members, and ensuring positive and trusting relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve (Braga et al., 2019; Center for Evidence-based Crime Policy, n.d.-a, Center for Evidence-based Crime Policy, n.d.-b; Center for Evidence-based Crime Policy, n.d.-c).
- **Safe transportation initiatives,** such as providing free bicycle helmets and biking education to youth, identifying pedestrian routes, and supporting pedestrian and traffic calming infrastructure, promoting biking and walking, offering remote drop offs for youth that combine a bus ride with a shorter walk, and implementing crossing guard and school safety patrol programs (Lankarani et al., 2023; Pande et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2020; Safe Routes Partnership, n.d.).

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

Project FINE

Project FINE provides services and supports for immigrants and refugees in the Winona County area. They have multiple programs that aim to help immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Minnesota, including service navigation, cross-cultural community meals and conversations, educational and interactive sessions about different cultures, and other opportunities to strengthen cultural knowledge and identities. Additionally, they provide assistance in multiple languages and offer interpretation and translation services for businesses, providers, and organizations to help facilitate health appointments, conferences, and other types of meetings.

More information about [Project FINE (www.projectfine.org/)](www.projectfine.org/)

Saint Paul Police Department's Civilian Academy

The Civilian Police Academy at the Saint Paul Police Department is a ten-week program for residents to learn about how the department operates, including policies and practices, provide an opportunity for collecting feedback and input from residents, and ultimately improve relationships between the department and the communities the department serves.

More information about [Civilian Police Academy Community Engagement Division (www.stpaul.gov/departments/police/administration-office-chief/community-engagement-division/youth-outreach-2)](www.stpaul.gov/departments/police/administration-office-chief/community-engagement-division/youth-outreach-2)

Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School aims to increase safety for youth traveling to and from school, as well as reduce traffic and improve air quality near schools. There are multiple program components, including education regarding transportation safety and related skills such as biking, promoting biking and walking, helping students and schools identify safe routes, and infrastructure improvements.

More information about [Safe Routes to School (www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/)](www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/)

Open Streets Minneapolis

Open Streets Minneapolis is a collaborative effort between Our Streets Minneapolis and the City of Minneapolis, and it involves closing segments of major roads to vehicle traffic for a day. Closing the streets to cars allows community members and visitors to walk, bike, roll or use another form of pedestrian mode of transportation. The event aims to strengthen a sense of community, encourage community members to view streets as public spaces, and support small businesses and local artists.

More information about Open Streets Mpls (www.openstreetsmpls.org/)

Examples of national initiatives

Certified Welcoming designation

Certified Welcoming is a designation awarded to communities with policies and programs that are inclusive and welcoming to immigrants. To be eligible for the designation, communities must meet certain requirements related to government and community leadership, equitable access to services, civic engagement and related opportunities, safety and preventing discrimination, education, economic development, and connections and trust between residents.

More information about Certified Welcoming designation through Welcoming America (welcomingamerica.org/)

Safe Streets

Safe Streets is an evidence-based program that aims to address and prevent violence in Baltimore, Maryland. The program involves outreach staff responding to conflicts, serving as role models and trusted messengers, changing norms related to violence, and connecting youth to services and resources to address and prevent violence.

More information about Safe Streets (monse.baltimorecity.gov/safe-streets-new)

Or go to Conducting Research That Addresses Public Health Issues Worldwide (www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-prevention-of-youth-violence/field_reports/Safe_Streets.html)

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