



Working Cradle to Community in New Orleans

Advancing Integrated Solutions to Violence through Early Childhood Approaches

This narrative is excerpted from Chris Gunther's remarks in a 2016 presentation. At the time, he was Manager of Strategic Initiatives at the New Orleans Health Department.

Photo credit: City of New Orleans. Father and daughter at the Crescent City Dads Kickoff Event

Our work in violence prevention began a few years ago when New Orleans' Mayor Mitch Landrieu recognized the issue of violence as a public health concern. After asking the health department to lead violence prevention strategies as part of a broader public health approach, Mayor Landrieu launched the NOLA for Life Murder Reduction Strategy in 2012. This comprehensive strategy, known as NOLA for Life, employs strategies that cut across prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry. A recent four-year progress report on NOLA for Life found that New Orleans has had the highest rate of murder reduction of any city in the county over the last four years. While we still have a long way to go, things are moving in a positive direction, and we see this progress as an opportunity to double down on investments we have made in prevention and continue to move upstream on this issue. In particular, the Cradle to Community framework has been an influential tool

for us as we advance integrated solutions to violence through our early childhood efforts. We have recognized the opportunity to bridge our murder reduction and early childhood work and make an impact early in the lives of children to help prevent and, at the very least, mitigate the adverse experiences they may be at risk for.

With around 50,000 visits per year in our free WIC clinics, we began to see WIC as a nexus for family violence prevention.

We started by examining our existing early childhood work and investments to see how we could connect those to violence prevention, starting with our Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children that has a long and important history of providing critical nutritional support to low-income families in vulnerable communities. In New Orleans, we saw an overlap of WIC clinic locations and hotspots for community violence, and we suspected that

folks coming into our WIC clinics were likely to be exposed to violence on a regular basis. This became a real opportunity to begin taking a primary prevention approach to reducing murders and having an impact in neighborhoods where we already had a presence.

We are integrating fatherhood supports into our Healthy Start program to improve parent-child and familial relationships and reduce violence.

With around 50,000 visits per year in our free WIC clinics, we began to look at WIC as a nexus for family violence prevention. We also saw this as an opportunity to have a population-wide impact due to the large number of New Orleans children that are income-eligible for WIC. We began by instituting intimate partner violence screenings as a standard practice at all of our WIC clinics to serve as a starting place for dialogues with clients around healthy and safe relationships. Adult clients who are at risk for intimate partner violence are then referred to the New Orleans Family Justice Center for further services. In order to move more upstream, we are also collaborating with the Children's Bureau of New Orleans and the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine to pilot two positive parenting interventions in our WIC clinics, including Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and Play Nicely. These interventions are both brief, one-time interventions designed to prevent child maltreatment by teaching parents skills to build strong, healthy relationships with their children. Triple P is a family support system designed to develop positive family relationships and prevent and improve behavioral and emotional problems in children and teenagers. Play Nicely is a computer-based intervention for parents to learn supportive parenting strategies. While both programs have been shown to reduce child



City of New Orleans Health Department

The New Orleans Health Department is looking at ways to promote breastfeeding through advertising and public awareness.

maltreatment, they have never before been tested in a WIC setting and are showing promising results.

Healthy Start is a community-based program that has historically focused on addressing high rates of infant mortality, particularly in African American communities. Traditionally, many of Healthy Start's services support new or expectant mothers. In New Orleans, we have recently started integrating fatherhood supports into our Healthy Start program with the goal of improving parent-child and familial relationships to reduce violence. Moving forward, Healthy Start will be implementing two fatherhood curricula, including 24/7 Dad and Parents as Teachers, and we will also be hosting more father engagement events through NOLA for Life. More recently, we have started exploring the possibility of working with men at the Orleans Justice Center in order to provide incarcerated fathers with the supports they need to play a positive role in the lives of their children.

Early attachment and bonding are important for promoting community safety and preventing violence.

We have also started to examine the role of breastfeeding in the development of healthy families and safe communities through breastfeeding education that includes not only mothers, but also fathers, partners, families, and communities. Through video and media campaigns, we have started looking at ways to enhance advertising and public awareness around breastfeeding. We ensure that our campaign photos include men and are set in culturally resonant places through the city to try and strike a chord with residents. We have also engaged mothers and children in a PhotoVoice project on breastfeeding. Many of the images, murals, and poems that have come out of this project highlight the positive impacts that early attachment and bonding can have on community safety and violence.

Lessons Learned

1. **Prevention strategies should cut across sectors and forms of violence.** CDC's and PI's [Connecting the Dots](#) and PI's Cradle to Community framework have been particularly useful resources as we advance integrated solutions to violence and address shared risk and protective factors. When all of these health factors are converging on the same neighborhoods, it calls for a response that is beyond a single program, risk factor, or issue.
2. **The life-course approach can be an important component of a primary prevention strategy.** Aligning our early childhood and violence prevention work has allowed us to prevent and mitigate adverse experiences that children may be at risk for later on, including violence.
3. **We have found value in linking existing efforts and finding ways to maximize impacts of programs already in place.** Instead of starting from scratch, we looked at our NOLA for Life Murder Reduction Strategy and existing early childhood work and investments and found ways to create synergy and alignment between those two bodies of work.
4. **Building a shared sense of ownership and responsibility around the wellbeing of vulnerable children and families in disadvantaged neighborhoods is critical.** Multiple sectors have a role to play and building joint capacity and educating others about the role they can play is an important foundation for this work.

Authorship & Resources

At the time of this presentation, **CHRIS GUNTHER** was Manager of Strategic Initiatives at the New Orleans Health Department. The Health Department's vision includes building a healthy New Orleans through equitable social and environmental conditions and through policies, programs, and partnerships that promote health.

Recognizing positive early childhood development as an important component of a comprehensive violence prevention strategy, the New Orleans Health Department is working to bridge their community safety and early childhood efforts. The agency is focused on strengthening and aligning current work to support the development of positive parenting skills and strong family relationships, enhance supports for fathers, and promote breastfeeding as an important part of healthy parent-child bonding and early attachment. These efforts not only help to promote optimal child development, but also mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors for multiple forms of violence.

Chris Gunther presented on New Orleans's violence prevention and early childhood work as part of a Cradle to Community panel at the 2016 American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting in Denver, CO. This narrative is excerpted from his remarks.

UNITY, a Prevention Institute initiative, builds community safety in cities through comprehensive, multi-sector strategies that prevent violence and support community resilience. By supporting practice and innovation, UNITY has been collectively advancing the field and shifting the paradigm on community violence and what cities can do about it since 2005.

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND INNOVATION NETWORK FOR COMMUNITIES (EARLY CHILDHOOD LINC), an initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, was developed by and for local communities across the country working to support families and improve results for young children through accelerating the development of effective, integrated, local early childhood systems.

RESOURCES

[NOLA for Life](#)

[Bridging Maternal & Child Health and Violence Prevention Strategies: How Baltimore Promotes Safety Across the Life Course](#)

[Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence](#)

[Cradle to Community: A Focus on Community Safety and Healthy Child Development](#)

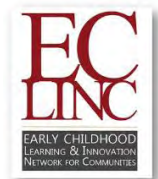
[First 5 Alameda County: Place-based Community Safety Approaches for Early Childhood Development](#)

[The imperative of safety: How community safety supports optimal early childhood development](#)

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INCREASE THRIVING YOUTH
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through Violence Prevention



CRADLE TO COMMUNITY: A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

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project identified strategic policy, practice, systems, and norms change levers to make communities safer so that all children have the opportunity to develop optimally.

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