URBAN NETWORKS TO
INCREASE THRIVING YOUTH
UNITY
through Violence Prevention

Prevention
Institute
Prevention
and equity | at the center of community well-being

Speaking Truth to Power:
The Path Forward in Support of Safe Communities
March 29 to 31, 2017

In recognition of the dramatically shifting national landscape, a group of leaders in community violence prevention gathered for a meeting at Prevention Institute's (PI) Oakland, California office. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit, nearly 25 leaders and practitioners working at the local and national levels strategized about where we go from here – for cities and counties, and as a network and movement – in support of safer communities. At a time when the national rhetoric emphasizes law enforcement approaches and the landscape across the country is of increasing divisiveness and fear, the meeting's dialogue and outcomes underscored the value of speaking truth to power. Participants:

1. Identified **needs, opportunities, and priorities** to advance prevention approaches to violence, and shape UNITY's strategic direction going forward, in the context of a changing landscape;
2. Discussed implications for **operationalizing the [Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience](#) framework as a model** to address core issues related to urban violence;
3. Built on recent local efforts and UNITY efforts, e.g., Cradle to Safe Community, to **explore local innovations in resources, partnerships, and shaping the narrative**; and,
4. **Explored additional topics** put forth by participants through various sessions and activities.

These proceedings synthesize the discussions, including recommendations and next steps for local and national work. While the meeting leveraged relationships forged through the [UNITY City Network](#),[1] the themes and directions highlight the state of violence prevention and represent a broader shared agenda across locales and national networks.

Meeting participants in front of Prevention Institute headquarters in Oakland, CA

credit: Christine Williams, Prevention Institute

Speaking Truth to Power: 5 Key Themes and Directions

1.   LEAD THE NARRATIVE

The need for and efficacy of comprehensive, multisector approaches that include prevention must be strongly reinforced. Participants expressed that this need is especially pressing now, given the rapidly changing national policy and narrative landscape, which has had a direct impact on violence prevention and public health efforts.

2.   INNOVATE IN PRACTICE AND POLICY

Locales across the country continue to develop innovative practices and policies in support of safe communities. Participants called for networks such as UNITY to continue gathering and widely sharing promising local examples, as well as developing guidance for planning, implementation, and continuous improvement. They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences through the UNITY City Network, and brainstormed further opportunities to do so.

3.   COUNTER STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Participants acknowledged the increasing recognition of, and need to address, systemic inequities that lead to adverse and disparate safety outcomes. Structural violence refers to harm that individuals, families and communities experience from the economic and social structures; social institutions; and relations of power, privilege, and inequality and inequity that may harm people and communities by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. For example, the current national rhetoric and policies around immigration have generated fear, separated families, and widely discouraged immigrant communities from accessing public services. In discussions on various topics, including community-level trauma and police-community trust, participants agreed on the need to counter the production of unsafe communities through influencing the policies, practices, and procedures of multiple sectors. Promising solutions lay in undergirding community resilience and resistance comprehensively across the sociocultural, physical/built, and economic/educational environments.

4.   LEVERAGE PUBLIC HEALTH'S STRENGTHS

Participants called out differential strengths among disciplines and sectors, and the value of articulating the unique contributions of public health. They emphasized the need to lift up the strengths and assets of public health in service to safer communities. Rather than maintaining a neutral convening role in communities, for example, participants recommended that public health leverage its strengths to emerge as a "transparent" and "compelling" convener.

5.   COALESCE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

To counteract changes in the national context, UNITY City Network partners called for the cultivation of a national leadership umbrella for community safety efforts. This national leadership umbrella would be developed in recognition of the innovative and groundbreaking work taking place at the local level, and would support further local and state efforts to promote safety.

Speaking Truth to Power: Recommendations and Next Steps

Participants made a number of recommendations and proposed next steps for each of the five key themes and directions.

1.   LEAD THE NARRATIVE

Countering the current narrative, which was described as fostering fear and hate and promoting a tough-on-crime approach to community safety, can be promoted through actions to:

a. **Orient the narrative to focus on systems rather than individuals,** including by:
   a. Changing the frame from "violence prevention" to "community safety;"
   b. Focusing on the underlying contributors of violence, to steer toward the context of historical and current-day inequities experienced by entire communities and away from blaming individuals; and,
   c. Prioritizing "landscape" instead of "portrait" framing, to focus on context and environment instead of individual behaviors.
b. **Elevate the importance of public health and community safety**, for example, as offering an approach that is critical and complementary to criminal justice approaches, and as a pathway to economic prosperity and national security. An important piece of this is emphasizing the link between public health and community safety; namely, that public safety is a key part of public health, in the first place.
c. **Lead with values**, particularly ones that are shared broadly and will resonate widely, including: inclusion, respect, and opportunity.
d. **Lift up and disseminate local models** of successful efforts applying the public health approach to building community safety and resilience.
e. **Support communities to tell their stories** and shape their own narratives.
f. **Expand the types of messengers and channels of messaging** in order to represent and reach more diverse communities and sectors, and to emphasize that everyone has a role to play in community safety.

2.   INNOVATE IN PRACTICE AND POLICY

Current local innovations can be lifted up and further innovation can be stimulated through actions to:

a. **Address the intersection of multiple forms of violence**. Increasingly, communities and practitioners are recognizing the shared risk and resilience factors among different forms of violence, and exploring strategies that address multiple forms of violence at once, through a "linked as well as distinct" approach to violence prevention. The publication, Connecting the Dots, builds a case for practitioners to coordinate their efforts, increase their impact, and work toward preventing multiple forms of violence at once.
b. **Promote the anchor institutions strategy** to encourage key players to engage in building community safety. Among UNITY sites, this approach was also recognized as a major strategy for developing local wealth for communities, through partnerships with health care institutions and businesses, for example.

c. **Explore new ways to expand the funding base** for violence prevention. Some examples included engaging with local philanthropy and health-based foundations; leveraging tax breaks earned by corporations; and exploring the use of Wellness Funds.

d. **Share innovative measurement methods and metrics for community-level approaches**, such as the Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience (ACE|R) framework. Participants shared that many communities have already been working on building community-level resilience. Indicators and measurement tools can be shared through the UNITY City Network.

e. **Increase promising leadership** by creating more job opportunities dedicated to violence prevention and by providing training in the public health approach.

f. **Build the capacity of local CBOs** that are working to promote community safety in areas such as grants management and data/evaluation.

g. **Lift up and disseminate local models**, in recognition that much of the innovative work has originated from the local level. For example, Hillsborough County shared a new policy to incentivize violence prevention through government contracts.

h. **Provide implementation guidance** for effective approaches. Cities benefit from implementation guidance drawn from a synthesis of evidence, including research evidence and local practice and contextual evidence, along with brief examples.

3. COUNTER STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Community resilience and resistance can be advanced through actions to:

a. **Promote strategies to counter the production of structural violence**. For example, participants emphasized the importance of transparent budgeting processes. Budgets were described as a "moral contract" with communities.

b. **Widely disseminate [the ACE|R framework](#)**, which is a framework to explore community trauma and set a foundation to address it. The framework conveys that not only is community trauma a consequence of violence, including structural violence, but also that community trauma contributes to violence.

c. **Contextualize police violence** within historic and present day policies and practices. As well, emphasize the roles that multiple sectors have played in creating conditions for unsafe communities, instead of focusing on implicating specific individuals or sectors.

d. **Counter divisive narratives** and ensure that efforts moving forward do not inadvertently pit one group against one another or leave groups out. For example, support for immigrants should not undermine needs for American Indian or African American populations; nor should a focus on violence in urban settings be pitted against violence in rural settings.

e. **Facilitate conversations about structural violence across institutions**. Public health is well-placed to recruit allies and bring together different institutions to have these discussions.

f. **Convene national-level strategic conversations** about police violence as a public health issue, in continued partnership with organizations such as Cities United and the American Public Health Association (APHA).

g. **Collect data** that reflects the impact of changing national policy on communities, and **widely disseminate this data** to support transparency, accountability, and a focus on underlying contributors to violence.

The second day of the meeting took place on Cesar Chavez Day. Recognizing the spirit of the day, one participant shared a poem that addresses structural violence and inequities:

Prayer of the Farm Workers' Struggle
Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people's plight.
Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.
Help me take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others;
For in service there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world.
Amen.
-- Cesar E. Chavez

4. LEVERAGE PUBLIC HEALTH'S STRENGTHS

Participants rallied around public health's assets and skillsets to leverage, e.g., scientific methodology, evidence-base, and skills in convening multiple sectors. They emphasized the need to elevate the public health's standing as a "transparent" and "compelling" (though not "neutral") convener through actions to:

a. **Promote underlying values that prioritize health and safety for all.** In the context of an increasingly divisive climate and national narrative, a focus on shared values among communities—such as inclusion, respect, and opportunity—can support bridge-building and generate momentum forward.
b. **Act as a convener** by connecting various sectors and agencies with the community. Public health can leverage existing relationships and build bridges to enhance its credibility within communities and influence change.
c. **Apply proven methodologies** for creating safe and healthy communities. The public health approach has been demonstrated to be effective in preventing various health and safety problems, including violence. An effective and comprehensive public health methodology focuses on primary prevention, engages community members and multiple sectors, is informed by evidence, and addresses underlying risk and resilience factors.

    d. **Make use of data and scientific methods** to be transparent and accountable to communities by understanding the issue, monitoring progress, and modeling continuous improvement. These include innovative methods, such as Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to understand relationships among social determinants and health and safety outcomes.

    e. **Evaluate programs, interventions, and strategies**, using quantitative data as well as the contextual and experiential evidence from communities. Evaluation data helps to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and communicate impact to various audiences, such as funders and the broader community.

5. COALESCE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Participants explored new and existing partnerships that could be developed, and emphasized the need to support innovative work taking place at the local and state levels. A national leadership umbrella to support community safety efforts can be cultivated through actions to:

    a. **Hold the gains of municipal approaches**, in light of a changing national approach. Networks such as the UNITY City Network highlight the progress and innovation taking place in local communities, and allow for the exchange of effective approaches and resources. Such networks also support local communities in maintaining their gains even in the context of a changing narrative and approach at the national level.

    b. **Strengthen existing partnerships between national entities**, such as the UNITY City Network and Cities United, particularly around shared interests, such as police-community trust.

    c. **Explore new partnerships**, particularly with networks supporting state- and local-level efforts, such as the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the National Governor's Association (NGA).

Closing and Immediate Next Steps

Participants closed the meeting with expressions of deep gratitude for the community of practice and the new and long-term connections that inspire, nourish, and sustain us as leaders and advocates. Each participant left with immediate takeaways to apply to their work, and the charge to continue to partner across the network and beyond to advance the themes and directions in support of safe communities.

Vision Quilt
A visual meeting backdrop was provided through a partnership between PI and Vision Quilt, a nonpartisan nonprofit that empowers communities to create solutions to gun violence through the power of art and inclusive dialogue. Vision Quilt filled the back wall of the meeting space with panels created by people impacted by gun violence, including youth and gun owners:

Throughout the meeting, participants collectively created three new Vision Quilt panels, reflecting on violence, prevention, and safety:

UNITY Is…

To synthesize discussions and close the meeting, participants shared what UNITY means to them, in a few words. Their responses help to define UNITY as an initiative, a network, a movement, and a leader in the field within the current national context.

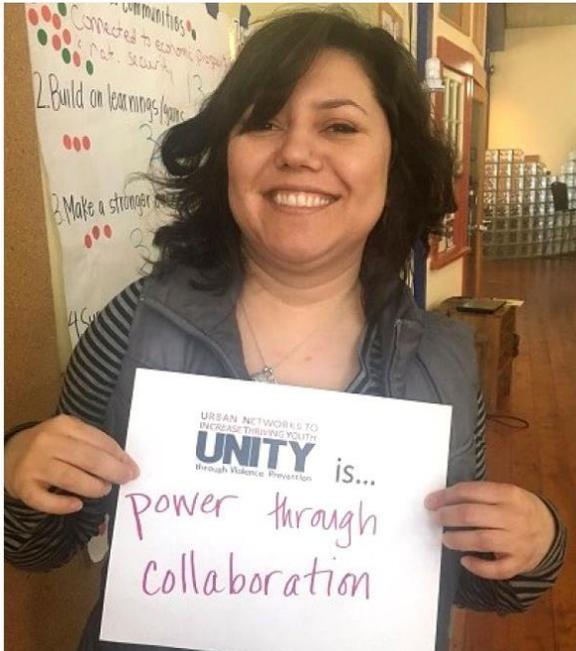"UNITY is… intentional opportunity"
Jose Arreola, Salinas, CA

"UNITY is… a comprehensive RESPONSE!"
Mighty Fine, American Public Health Association

"UNITY is… the leadership CHANGE AGENT"
Tony Gomez, Seattle/King County, WA
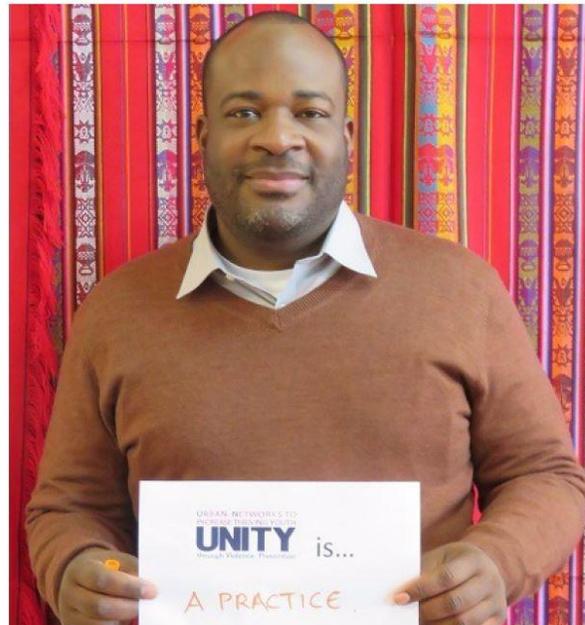
"UNITY is… A PRACTICE"
Reggie Moore, Milwaukee, WI

"UNITY is… power through collaboration"
Maritza Valenzuela, Denver, CO

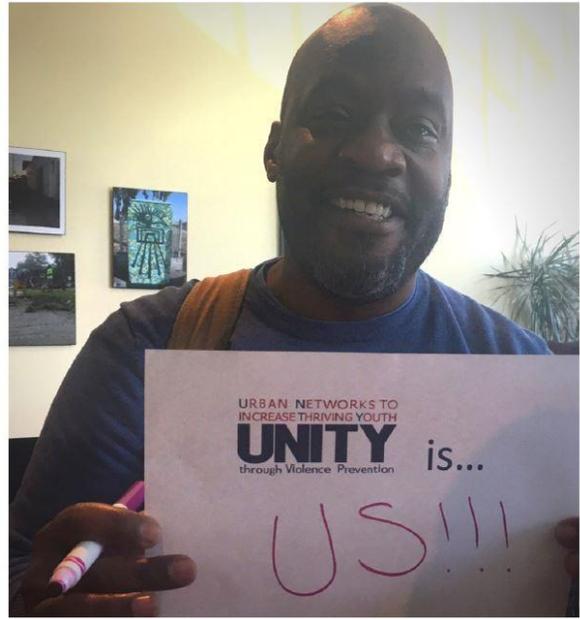"UNITY is… purpose"
Andrea Flores-Shelton, Santa Clara County, CA

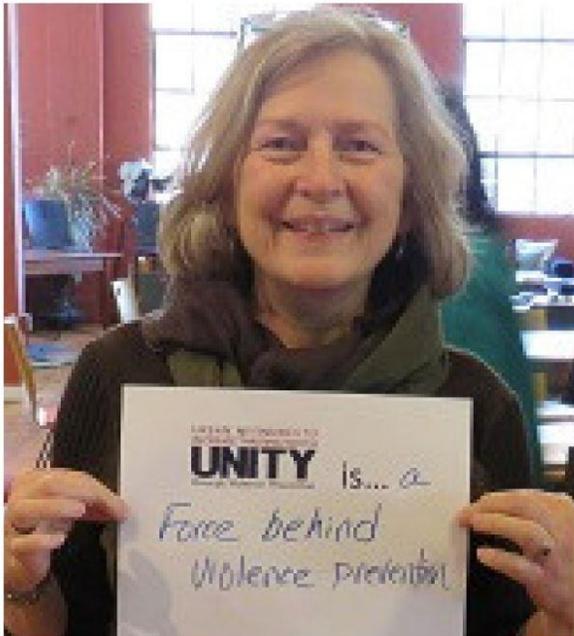"UNITY is… AWESOME. ACHIEVABLE"
Deborah Moore, Houston, TX
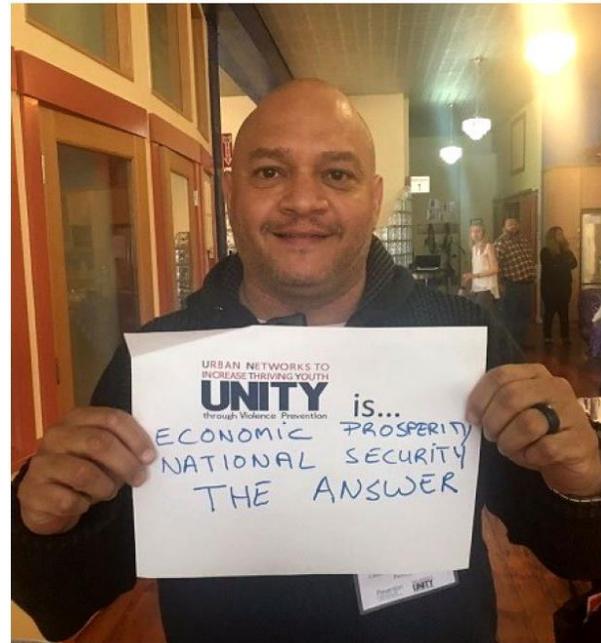
"UNITY is… economic prosperity, national security, THE ANSWER"
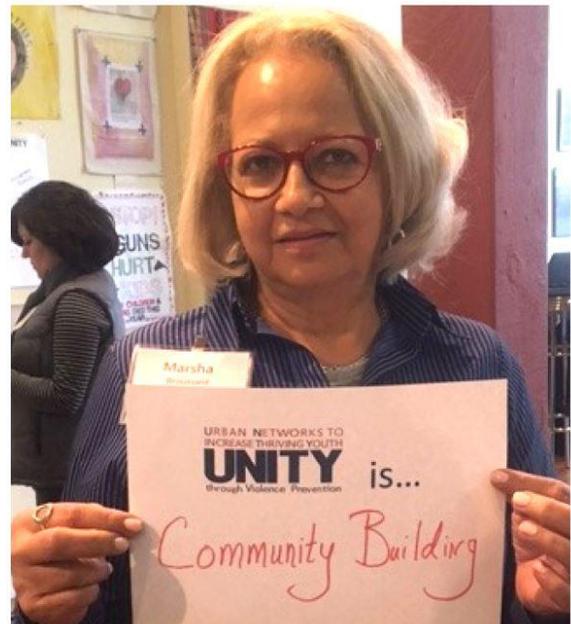Neil Rainford, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

"UNITY is… imperative! 'The children are the future' [fact]"
Natoya Walker Minor, Cleveland, OH

"UNITY is… US!!!"
Anthony Smith, Cities United

"UNITY is… a force behind violence prevention"
Gretchen Musicant, Minneapolis, MN

"UNITY is… community-building"
Marsha Broussard, New Orleans, LA

Meeting Participants
(in alphabetical order)

Jose Arreola
Community Safety Administrator
City of Salinas, California

Freddy Barton
Executive Director
Safe and Sound Hillsborough, Florida

Marsha Broussard
Director
New Orleans Health Department, Louisiana

Mighty Fine
Deputy Director
Center for Professional Development
Public Health Systems and Partnerships
American Public Health Association

Andrea Flores-Shelton
Injury and Violence Prevention Manager
Santa Clara County Public Health Department,
California

Analilia Garcia
Racial and Health Equity
Senior Health Care Program Manager
Santa Clara County Public Health Department,
California

Tony Gomez
Violence and Injury Prevention Manager
Seattle and King County Public Health
Department, Washington

Tracie McClendon-Cole
Deputy Health Director
Kansas City Health Department, Missouri

Deborah Moore
Director
Houston Health Department, Texas

Reggie Moore
Director, Office of Violence Prevention
City of Milwaukee Public Health Department,
Wisconsin

Gretchen Musicant
Health Commissioner
City of Minneapolis Health Department,
Minnesota

Howard Pinderhughes
Associate Professor, Department of
Social and Behavioral Sciences
University of California San Francisco
UNITY Lead Partner

Deborah Prothrow-Stith
Dean, College of Medicine
Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and
Science, California
UNITY Lead Partner

Neil Rainford
Team Lead/Public Health Advisor
Division of Violence Prevention
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Anthony Smith
Executive Director
Cities United

Maritza Valenzuela
Youth Health Manager
Health Promotion Program
Denver Public Health, Colorado

Natoya Walker Minor
Interim Director
Cleveland Department of Public Health, Ohio

Andrea Welsing
Director, Injury and Violence Prevention
Program
LA County Public Health Department, California

Billie Weiss
Department of Epidemiology
UCLA Fielding School of Public Health
UNITY Lead Partner

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.

Prevention Institute UNITY staff:

Ruben Cantu, Program Manager
Larry Cohen, Executive Director
Rachel Davis, Managing Director and UNITY Project Director
Dana Fields-Johnson, Program Manager
Lisa Fujie Parks, Associate Program Director
Sheila Savannah, Director
Alisha Somji, Program Coordinator

For More Information:
UNITY, Prevention Institute
unity@preventioninstitute.org
(510) 444-7738