

Panhandle Partnership
Community Context Problem Mapping

Process

The Community Context Problem Mapping process began with the participants in the first Child Well Being Assessment and Planning Meeting.

Scope of Findings

It is noted that the process was undertaken by a group of interested parties within the health and human services sector. Additional focus groups or processes were not required for the Child Well Being Assessment. However increased understanding of Community Context would occur from additional problem mapping from diverse groups and community from across the Panhandle.

Definition of Problem

The problem was identified as

Panhandle communities are not safe and nurturing environments for all children.

Three break-out groups then created problem maps of why the Panhandle is not a safe and nurturing community for all children. The areas addressed were:

Identification of Factors

- Behavioral Factors, the specific actions that cause the problem. If this action had not taken place the problem would not occur.
- Contributing Factors, the circumstances that exist that that lead to or encourage the behavior. If these circumstances did not exist the behavior would not have occurred or would be less likely to occur.
- Root/Community Causes, the larger community decisions, specific norms or formal or informal practices which impact the contributing factors. If these root causes were addressed the contributing factor would not exist.

Break out groups reported back to the large group and several commonalities and additional points were discussed. At that point it was the consensus of the large group that a few people should review all of the work and draft a single version that combined the work of the three groups into a single document for further review.

In compiling a single version the problem statement of “not being a safe and nurturing community for all children” was kept at the forefront. The Behaviors, Contributing Factors, Root/Community Causes from the three participant groups were placed in like groups or clustered by common theme. While many groups had listed the same factors there was not commonality in which category they had placed them in (Behavior, Contributing and Root Causes). Therefore the work group did take some license to move factors between stages in order to cluster. As well, the group determined that in the clustering some items listed actually provided definition to a larger key topic. As a result, not all factors and consequences listed in the individual group problem maps appear in the final community context problem map. The narrative lists provided below should assist participants in seeing these connections.

Community Context Behaviors and Definitions

Three types of behaviors result in children not being safe and nurtured in the Panhandle.

Physical Violence

Physical violence includes acts which may result in harm to a child. Bullying from peers, sexual abuse/assault, physical contact by a parent or adult, depriving children of food and basic needs for an extensive period of time, crime in communities, and gang activities are example of physical acts of violence which may cause injury or death to a child.

Emotional and Mental Abuse

Emotional and mental abuse includes acts which demean children, impact self esteem, and reduce resiliency. Bullying, withholding basic needs, cyber bullying, parents, adults, and communities minimizing children, isolating children from the community, are forms of emotional and mental abuse.

Neglect

Neglect is failure to provide for the basic physical and emotional needs of children. Neglect is also those behaviors which place a child in undue risk whether the child is injured or not, especially where the child cannot or does not feel safe to correct the situation. For example, having children as passengers when an adult is driving a car under the influence of alcohol is a form of neglect – even if no accident occurs.

Contributing Factors

Contributing factors are the circumstances that exist that that lead to or encourage the behavior. If these circumstances did not exist the behavior would not have occurred or would be less likely to occur.

The combined contributing factors are as follows:

Basic Needs Not Being Met

- Inadequate nutrition
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Poor quality housing (no heat, refrigerators, plumbing, mold)
- Homelessness

Parenting and Demands on Parents

- Parents working multiple jobs
- Decreased supervision/children at home alone
- Low knowledge and skills around child abuse and neglect
- Low knowledge and skills around parent child interaction
- Stress
- Perceived willingness to parent
- Quality of supervision after school

Adult Behavior in the Community

- Poor positive role models
- Inappropriate sexual activity between adults
- Drug abuse
- Alcohol misuse
- Selling illegal drugs
- Children as passengers in vehicles while DUI

Youth Behaviors

- Engage in risky behaviors
- Poor peer influences
- Alcohol and drug use
- Inappropriate sexual behavior of youth
- Disrespect of adults

Youth Development Approaches

- No shared view of youth development in communities
- Limited interest in community service learning
- Lack goals
- Confusion in roles

Social Supports

- Missing links between generations
- Limited social supports/maternal supports low
- Transplanted families lack supports
- Technology lowers direct interaction and supports

Undiagnosed and Untreated Mental Illness

- Of parents
- Of children
- Limited access to professionals
- Payment and policies
- Community understanding of mental illness
- Depression

Department of Health and Human Services

- Lives become worse for children and families reported with child abuse and neglect
- Risk of abuse and neglect increases when in DHHS
- Disconnect with DHHS

Education

- Low (quality) parental involvement in schools
- No sex education in schools
- School drop outs

- Extent to which education valued

Media Messages/Local and National

Root/Community Causes

Root/Community causes are the larger community decisions, specific norms or formal or informal practices which impact the contributing factors. If these root causes were addressed the contributing factor would not exist. Participants identified root causes which were then grouped as follows:

Poverty

- Increased poverty as related to the economy (jobs, living wages, etc)
- Middle class shifting to poverty level

Cycle of Generational Poverty

- Poverty thinking
- Sense of entitlement
- Enabling

Economy

- Increased unemployment rates
- People working more than one (two and three) jobs

Unemployment /Underemployment

- Lack of job skills
- Quality of available work force (work ethic)
- Cost of training staff

Rural Reality

- Geography (our density is similar to Alaska)
- Lack of availability of services (population/cost benefit, and access)
- Decreasing leadership capacity – young people who receive go away to college and don't come back; those remaining may not have had opportunities to develop leadership skills
- Out migration

Community Norms

- Don't have common community norms/values
- Competing cultural norms (violence is acceptable to gang members)
- Communities don't acknowledge children

Lack of Consistent Law Enforcement

- Legal systems change moral code (as we shift definitions in law and application of law society changes)

- Rules change so people's values change
- Lack of community support for law enforcement

Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism

- Not acknowledged and affirmed

Social Justice

- Inequitable application of laws and rules
- Opportunities are not equal

Community Disorganization

- Low of sense of community pride
- Vacant and dilapidated buildings
- Apathy
- Miscommunication
- Blame game
- Community doesn't acknowledge problem
- Community doesn't acknowledge all children
- Alcohol outlet density

Systems Failure (DHHS)

- Poor policy, poor application of policy
- Kids and families have increased fear and decreased trust

Access to Health Care

- Medicaid conditions
- Results in low birth weight babies
- Unable to access pre natal care leads to larger issues for child and community

Access/Acceptance of Health Promotion

- Contraceptives not available
- Contraceptives not taught
- Obesity
- Untreated chronic disease (diabetes, etc)

Identification of Consequences

Participants were then asked to identify the consequences of not addressing the issue of children not being safe and healthy in the Panhandle. Groups were asked to identify consequences in general and were not asked to place in categories of consequences. Consequences were then grouped and placed in categories for review and affirmation at a subsequent meeting.

Direct Consequences

Direct consequences are the specific result of problem. In other words if the Panhandle were a safe and nurturing place for all children these problems would not occur.

- Hunger
- Death
- Suicide
- Physical injuries to children
- Emotional injuries to children (sense of hopelessness, children not feeling valued, less resilience and self sufficiency)
- Poverty and continued cycle of poverty
- All children are at risk

Secondary Consequences

Secondary consequences are the additional results or possible outcomes from the Direct Consequence. If the Direct Consequence did not exist this would not exist.

- Teen pregnancies/unwanted pregnancies
- Increased STDs
- Drug abuse among children and youth
- Alcohol use among children and youth
- Increased crime/vandalism
- Poor School Outcomes
- Teens having to support teens (couch surfing)
- Obesity
- Diabetes and medical conditions
- Increased developmental delays
- Increased behavioral disorders in children
- Children have multiple hurdles to succeed

Community/System Consequences

Community/System Consequences are the impacts on the community/system of the Secondary Consequences.

- Children enter DHHS system
- Juvenile Justice system overload
- Full jails
- Lost revenue to government agencies
- Population decline
- Increased taxes

- Financial cost to community/society
- Declining quality of life
- Higher medical care costs

Linkages with other Child Well Being Efforts

Regional Alcohol Misuse Reduction Efforts

In the 2009 SPF SIG Assessment and Planning process the following themes were identified which relate and further define the work of the Child Well Being Group.

Historical Themes and Trends

The history of settlement of this western area shaped and still impacts the community culture toward alcohol especially:

- Alcohol as a reward for a man's day of work.
- The entitlement of personal domain. "It is my land and I can drink where I want when I want."
- Don't interfere in others business and they won't interfere in yours.

As the area was developed by railroads, oil, and highway construction, a hard working, hard drinking wide open west where anything goes theme was promulgated. Many communities that have work crews from other areas come in still deal with this perception and the ensuing alcohol misuse and fights.

Leadership and decisions were in the hands of the prominent few. Elected leaders and law enforcement were accountable to this group and expectations of preferential treatment were not uncommon. For many individuals this theme carries through to today not only in regard to alcohol related issues but to a myriad of local issues. It is part of the community power structures on which individuals rely and by which some elect their local leadership. In other towns some citizens expect preferential treatment from elected and appointed positions of leadership in communities.

Historically the role of law enforcement relative to alcohol related occurrences was varied. The one thing it was not was an actual "enforcement" of the law role. There are many stories of local officers coming across youth out partying and pulling up a seat and joining them, or pouring out the beer and disbanding. Those too drunk to drive expected officers to take them home. In one community meeting people noted that as recently as the 1950's alcohol disturbances were handled by "slipping the cop a bill." At the large majority of community meetings, and in law enforcement interviews, people noted that this attitude remains a challenge. People truly do not believe enforcement of alcohol laws is the responsibility of local police and state patrol.

Community Readiness to Address the Issue of Alcohol

At the base of these issues are the themes and trends noted in *Major Historical Events and Forces* which are the foundation of community norms and as such impact the regional ability to comprehensively affect change in all three priority areas selected. These historical events and forces have resulted community behaviors and expectations which make change difficult. These include:

- The history of personal behavior in general (not just alcohol use and misuse) has been an "individual behavior choice hands off attitude". Because everyone in the

community knows everyone else's business community members have developed the practice of not talking about the real issues for fear of offending community members and being judged themselves. As one faith leader so aptly described in one community meeting *"We may know all your nasty stuff, but it's okay. People are unwilling to take a stand. It's hard to do anything about it because we know it will have a ripple effect on kids, other family members and others. So as a community we have open secrets. We take the safe way of acknowledging the problem, which is to provide families food and help, while not addressing the actual behavior."*

- What has now occurred is what might be called dysfunctional communities in denial. As noted in one meeting, *"There are so many elephants in the room that you can't fit in the people. If you draw that line, you lose business, you even lose friends."* In addition to substance use/misuse this affects all aspects of personal behavior including domestic violence, business ethics, child abuse and neglect. One community member noted that for many the real fear is "that if we start seriously dealing with one area (alcohol) we will open up the can of worms on other areas."
- The history of prominent citizens expecting elected leaders to treat the elite and their families with preferential treatment to avoid citation and prosecution. Many people point out that this is no different than any other place in the country. "It happens everywhere." It may happen everywhere, but what is different is the transparency of smaller populated areas. In larger cities a citizen may know it is happening, but does not know who the people are who are involved. In small rural communities everyone knows it is happening and who is involved. The result is elitism which also clearly implies that all citizens are not equal and that community efforts (in this case toward alcohol misuse) are really not for community improvement but as an additional control on certain populations. The fundamental question that we must address as a community is "How does our view of elitism put every child at risk?"
- Community readiness must also be addressed through cultural inclusion. While this area is discussed in more detail in *Cultural Diversity* community readiness capacity must also include the opportunity for minority community groups to organize in the way they choose and to provide leadership within their community, including on alcohol prevention. Both Native American and Hispanic communities have identified the need for local community groups within their own culture. It is also noted that the talking circle and personal ownership process used by the Native American community is a model for having the dialogue on community readiness for alcohol prevention. Regional support of these groups and a commitment to an ongoing process of opening the dialogue between cultures on alcohol and numerous related topics will enhance community readiness.

- There is a history in the region of isolation, loss of jobs and livelihoods, verbal and at times physical threats to those who seek to make change or begin to talk about issues. This has occurred with professional people (physicians, dentists, hospital administrators, faith leaders), elected officials, and municipal employees as well as average citizens. This is especially true in many of the smaller counties outside of Scottsbluff and was openly discussed throughout the assessment process. In these circumstances those working for change require conflict resolution skills and support.