

# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The focus of a healthy community, is one that is "Creating and Enriching Community through People, Programs and Partnerships" in the areas of Recreational, Cultural, Parks/Open Space, Environmental, and a strong Library System.

Whether this healthy community is within a network of robust neighborhood centers or complete neighborhoods, they each must provide services and programs for each of the following focus areas in order to provide a unique opportunity to help achieve a sense of purpose, identity, self-worth and improved self-esteem within the specialized areas of Cultural Arts, Library, Parks and Recreation. Providing these services will enrich the quality of life for those who live within these communities.

The basic categories that need to have balanced services are the following:

- **Early Childhood**
- **Students and Education**
- **Teens**
- **Arts and Culture**
- **Seniors**
- **Health and Wellness**
- **Open Spaces**
- **Safe Community**

## Early Childhood

- Early Childhood encompasses programs and services for ages 0 – 5. These are the formative years of development, when rapid acquisition of language, social skills, and physical development are crucial to future successes. Losses for children here compound as they grow, and are almost impossible to make up in adult life. Investments in early childhood have the greatest payoff over time.
- These programs represent a range of development opportunities for young children, from artistic learning, to structured physical activity to free play. Adults who offer these programs simultaneously work with caregivers, both providing tools that can be used at home and modeling activities and behaviors that promote development.

## Outcomes:

- **Literacy** – Children who do not read at grade level by grade 3 are most likely to never make up that deficit, and less likely to graduate from high school and go to college. In early childhood, current recommendations are that children have been exposed to 1,000 books before kindergarten – many more than parents can afford individually. Sharing stories with a professional also teaches parents how to read aloud effectively, discuss pictures and words with a young child, and start using skills such as math, pattern prediction, and framing a story of their own. Storytime is also often a young child's first group experience, adding to the development of social skills.
- **Physical development** – Children in the first two years of life quadruple their weight and add 2/3 to their height. The brain also grows rapidly and reaches 90% of adult size by age 6. Motor development depends on a combination of heredity and environment, with practice in coordinating movements a key factor, and programs must be designed to facilitate this.
- **Social development** – Children also develop socially during this time, learning concepts such as sharing, taking turns, and waiting in their first group experiences. Children take their first steps at creative expression, and these artistic steps in turn build skills such as writing and counting.
- **Artistic development** – Young children also develop fine motor skills through hands-on art – from scribbling comes the concepts of color, shape, and pictures.

## Citations:

- Parents, Children, Libraries, and Reading – A Study of the Pew Research Center, May 1, 2013.
- Consultive Group on Early Childhood Care and Development <http://www.talkingpage.org/artic012.html>
- Physical and Cognitive Development in Early Childhood [http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0073133809/student\\_view0/chapter7/](http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0073133809/student_view0/chapter7/)

## Students and Education

- Ensuring that the K-12 youth succeed in school is extremely important and should be a goal of every community. Programs should target resources to supporting homework, providing after school enrichment, and building social and cognitive skills that will serve these students in and out of school.
- Programs need to offer directed assistance with homework through the Public Library. This can be done online, and with volunteers assisting with assignments. In addition, after school programs must include directed time focused on homework completion. Lastly, environmental programs need to include science workshops, classes, and opportunities to complete hands-on science and nature projects to promote STEM education.

### **Outcomes:**

- **Homework assistance** – Among the recommendations from the US Department of Education related to homework are – having a quiet well-lit place to do homework, having needed materials, providing guidance and not answers, and rewarding progress. All of these are embedded in the homework resources available at the Public Library. Having these resources available for free, to all who need them, lessens the economic gap for homework achievement.
- **Supervision after school** – The hours from 3 to 6 p.m. are the peak times for juvenile crime and victimization. Youth left unsupervised after school are more likely to be sexually active, and to participate in risky behaviors. A study in 2007 found that “regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students.” Another study further revealed that “successful programs focus not just on academic support, but also offer other enrichment activities. Thus, balancing academic support with a variety of structured, engaging, and enjoyable extracurricular activities appears to improve academic performance.” Quality after school programs also have side benefits in social-emotional development for children, and key elements are the quality of the staff and frequency of participation.
- **Common Core and STEM Education** – Enabling students to succeed in school also requires supplementing formal school resources and tracking changes in academic trends. Two foci in recent years have been the implementation of Common Core and the rise in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. STEM has been a national focus for many years, and

Common Core is being implemented in California in 2013-14. The connection between after school programs, public library programs, and education is well established. Findings include “attending high-quality STEM afterschool programs yields STEM-specific benefits that can be organized under three broad categories: improved attitudes toward STEM fields and careers; increased STEM knowledge and skills; and higher likelihood of graduation and pursuing a STEM career.” As Common Core is implemented in California, the systems implementation plan calls specifically for communities to “Collaborate with parents, guardians and the early childhood and extended learning communities to integrate the CCSS into programs and activities beyond the K–12 school setting.” From infant and toddler programs to preschool and transitional kindergarten, Common Core will be impacting families well outside of the traditional K-12 setting.

**Citations:**

- US Department of Education: Homework Tips for Parents - <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/homework/homeworktips.pdf>
- What Research Says about the Value of Homework – Center for Public Education <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Instruction/What-research-says-about-the-value-of-homework-At-a-glance/What-research-says-about-the-value-of-homework-Research-review.html>
- Outcomes Linked to High Quality After School Programs. CS Mott Foundation. UC Irvine, Oct 2007. <http://www.policystudies.com/studies/?id=32>
- Secrets of Successful After School Programs: What Research Reveals. Harvard Graduate School of Education. <http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/learning/LD314-608.html>
- Science Technology Engineering and Math: Education for Global Leadership <http://www.ed.gov/stem>
- STEM Learning in Afterschool: An Analysis of Impact and Outcomes <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/STEM-Afterschool-Outcomes.pdf>

## Teens

- Teens (ages 12 – 17) are another age group with unique and distinct service needs. Programs serve teens in diverse settings, from the devoted Teen Centers to targeted programs in libraries, and in sports settings. The programs include social elements such as field trips and dances, volunteering for the community, and academic enrichment.

### **Outcomes:**

- **Lower risk** – As teens are more prone to make risky decisions, succumb to peer pressure, and base actions on immediate vs. long term rewards they require a distinct type of guidance in the best environment. Teens who do not participate in after school programs are more likely to skip classes or drop out while teens who do participate are more likely to value school and graduate along with gaining a greater ability to work in a group and learn vocational skills.
- **Teen volunteers** – Volunteering among has been linked to the development of teamwork skills and social identities for teens. This is a place where peer pressure works, as 70% of teen volunteers have friends who also volunteer. In addition, in this time fraught with bullying and social exclusion, teens who volunteered felt more inclusion ... especially when working with adults. Providing rich volunteer opportunities for teen volunteers engages them in building social capital and creating community cohesion as well as fulfilling community service requirements for school and college applications.

### **Citations:**

- Peer Pressure: It's Influence on Teens and Decision Making  
<http://headsup.scholastic.com/articles/peer-pressure-its-influence-on-teens-and-decision-making/>
- After School Matters: Our Impact <http://www.afterschoolmatters.org/node/12617>
- The Value of Feeling Included: The Impact of Feeling Included on Teen Volunteers' Organizational Satisfaction  
<http://www.ijova.org/PDF/IJOVA%20Sample%202%20Manuscript%20May%2014.pdf>
- Young People and Volunteering – DoSomething.org  
<http://www.dosomething.org/blog/teens-and-volunteering>

- Corporation for National and Community Service  
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/research-and-reports>

## Arts and Culture

- A community needs to embed arts in a variety of ways – from public art installations, to performances, to hands-on opportunities for all to engage with the arts. These programs should provide all with access to visual and performing arts. Having an Art Museum would also vastly improve the art education for the population of these communities, which could host a variety of exhibits, and is free to the public. Music, dance, plays, and other performances are provided locally. Singing and crafts are routinely incorporated into early childhood and literacy programs. Lessons in art, music, and dance are offered. Free cultural festivals enable the arts to merge with community culture and history. The arts and culture element programs needs to serve all ages.

### **Outcomes:**

- **Creativity** – More employers are citing the importance of creative thinking for problem solving. The “creative economy” of people who can adapt and problem solve quickly is growing faster than overall job growth. Creativity is a skill that can be learned, and education in the arts is critical – but not being done in cash-strapped formal education today. Programs should offer arts and cultural enrichment to all in the community, and many of the opportunities to listen to live music, see an art exhibit, or participate in an arts educational experience are free.
- **Arts Education** – Integrating arts into education is a critical missing piece in public schools today. A preschool program with an arts component leads to positive emotions in preschoolers, which in turn promotes social-emotional readiness to learn and positive methods of emotion regulation. Active participatory musical experiences as early as infancy promotes social behavior and pre-linguistic gestures. Something as simple as piano lessons increases vocabulary, and the language processing benefit stays for life, even if the person stops playing. Music integrated into a reading program improves reading comprehension. Arts education leads to higher graduation rates from school and interviews with potential high school dropouts reveal that many cite arts and

enrichment programs as reasons for staying in school. By offering ongoing arts opportunities across ages, and accessible to the community, all are enriched.

- **Physical and Mental Health** – Participating in hands-on creative opportunities serves all ages and improves both physical and mental health. Not only are the physical effects of singing similar to exercise, but studies show that older adults who sing together had reduced anxiety and depression, along with a better quality of life. Singing promotes social development, lowers stress, and elevates endorphins. Singing as a group is one of the most cost effective public health measures a community can provide. Performing art programs are essential in developing and building self esteem within all ages of community members.
- **Visually appealing community** –Integrating the arts into the visual landscape raises community awareness and pride. It creates an attachment to the community, provides art to those who may not buy a ticket or feel they can enter a museum, and has an economic benefit.

#### **Citations:**

- Creativity and Education: Why It Matters  
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- Arts Enrichment and Preschool Emotions for Low-Income Children at Risk  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200612000798>
- Active Music classes in infancy enhance musical, communicative and social development <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2012.01142.x/abstract>
- The Role of Arts in Educating America for Great Leadership and Economic Strength  
[http://artsusa.org/pdf/information\\_services/research/policy\\_roundtable/2010NAP\\_Rfullreport.pdf](http://artsusa.org/pdf/information_services/research/policy_roundtable/2010NAP_Rfullreport.pdf)
- Staying in School: Arts Education and New York City Graduation Rates  
<http://www.cae-nyc.org/arts-education-report>
- The Effect of Piano Lessons on the Vocabulary and Verbal Sequencing Skills of Primary Grade Students  
<http://pom.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/03/16/0305735608097248.abstract>

- Reading Improvement Through Music, Movement, and Play  
<http://joyfulnotemusic.blogspot.com/p/reading-improvement-through-music.html>
- Study into Benefits of Singing Proves Positive Impact on Health  
<http://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-benefits-positive-impact-health.html>
- Singing Changes Your Brain <http://ideas.time.com/2013/08/16/singing-changes-your-brain/>
- Why Public Art is Important <http://dirt.asla.org/2012/10/15/why-public-art-is-important/>

## Seniors

- The programs should serve all seniors in a variety of ways and working toward the overall goal of allowing seniors to age in place – remaining in their community and in their homes, keeping their community connections, and continuing to be a vital part of community fabric.

### **Outcomes:**

- **Socialization** – As movement gets more difficult, many seniors become isolated. Socialization is critical for ongoing health and wellness. Seniors who maintain social ties and interactions with others have improved mental and physical health. As people age they may cease having the benefits of workplace socialization, or lose the ability to drive leading to a loss of social opportunities. Providing these opportunities, and supplementing access with low fees and easy physical access to spaces, leads to improved health for seniors.
- Finding ways to be social can be a challenge for any age, especially when disconnected from established opportunities by physical or sensory impairment or transportation issues. Providing free and easy ways for a senior to meet a new group of people and engage in a discussion is another avenue of service. Library book groups, and other types of discussion groups, are an easy way for people to meet strangers, and instantly have something in common to stimulate discussion. Environments suitable to seniors and the chance to engage with the assistance of technology is part of the senior focused environments.
- **Physical Activity** – Engaging seniors in a groups setting, should include meals served at the Senior Center and the opportunity to exercise, increases the



likelihood of participation and improves physical health. Eating as a group leads to seniors getting more and better nutrition. Walking or engaging in physical activity as a group leads to more exercise and greater participation. Socialization and physical exercise both improve memory. Having physical activity environments suitable for seniors with physical impairments is essential in addition to senior facilities and Libraries that are fully ADA compliant and senior friendly.

### **Citations:**

- Socializing Linked with Quality of Life <http://www.holidaytouch.com/Retirement-101/senior-living-articles/health-and-wellness/socializing-linked-with-quality-of-life>
- Socializing With Youth Improves the Elderly's Health and Life Span <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=talk-to-teens-live-longer>
- Socialization: Natural Ways to Increase Brain Health <http://www.theseniorcareblog.com/post/socialization-natural-ways-increase-brain-health-part-4>

## **Health and Wellness**

- Community health is something defined in many different ways. Also called community cohesion, a community fabric, social capital, and civic engagement, it is an intangible “sense of community” that draws people in, keeps them engaged, and leads to stronger connections and ties among people and to place.
- Programs must work towards building this sense of interdependence by facilitating participation in community groups, offering meaningful and engaging volunteer opportunities, and creating environments that are physically and emotionally safe. Many activities teach skills that translate to life's challenges – from learning to cooperate and work toward a goal as a team, to respecting and valuing the contributions of others with differing points of view. Staff needs to be trained in working in groups, conflict resolution, and facilitating ongoing and meaningful communication so that all programs succeed.
- These communities also should maintain many places that facilitate community conversation, shared history, and pride. This includes parks and museums which allows citizens to learn a joint history, another significant element to building social capital.

## Outcomes:

- **Personal Health** – The presence of social capital and individual investment in community has an impact on personal health. From a decrease in risky behaviors to trust that the community at large will help individuals in need, this impact is felt across ages. Social capital hinders the development of depression, and lowers the likelihood of behaviors like binge drinking. Higher social capital leads to higher educational achievement and lowers misbehavior in school. Social capital also leads to higher civic engagement including participating in public discourse and voting.
- **Teamwork and Overcoming Adversity** – Participation in group sports helps teach the participant on the team learn that to achieve the desired outcome, everyone on the team plays a part and everyone has to work together and do their part. What a person learns on the sports fields pertaining to teamwork correlates to the real-world work place. Sports and teamwork are a metaphor of how a team of office co-workers approach a real-world assignment. An outcome is identified, and the team members use their individual efforts together to accomplish the goal. Participation in sports also helps teach participants to give it their best effort no matter what it is we are talking about. Sports teach you to keep trying, and that momentary setbacks do not equate to failure, as long as you don't give up and you keep trying. "If at first you don't succeed, try try again" as it were.
- **Volunteerism** – Having opportunities for people of all ages to volunteer builds social capital, and encourages bridging ages and community groups. One study showed that almost half of volunteers changed their opinion about how they felt about another community group, and over half started to socialize with people who were different than them. This leads to gained access to resources and community support. Participation in community activities builds influence for the person, and trust in the community. Voluntary associations are a key element of asset based community development and a builder of social capital.
- **Pride of Place** – Social norms established by a cohesive community lead to community pride. Individuals tied to, and proud of their place, are less likely to engage in vandalism and graffiti, and more likely to volunteer for events such as community clean up day, or to assist others in a disaster.

## Citations:

- Sense of Community [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense\\_of\\_community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense_of_community)
- Social Capital [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital)
- What is Social Capital?  
<http://www.socialcapitalinc.org/moreinformation/whatisocialcapital>
- Assist Social Capital <http://social-capital.net/>
- The Impact of Volunteering on Social Capital and Community Cohesion  
<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/health-and-life-sciences-documents/centre-for-social-action/reports-and-articles/the-impact-volunteering-social-capital.pdf>

## Open Spaces

- Open space is a significant community asset. Communities need to provide and maintain open space for public parks, athletic fields, and preserved natural space for citizens to enjoy. Within public parks are passive play spaces such as lawns and active play spaces such as sports courts and playgrounds. The nature center could be maintained as a preserved natural space, with both educational programming and the opportunity to paint and photograph the natural setting.

## Outcomes:

- **Economic Benefits** – Parks bring revenue to cities through increased property values, attracting affluent retirees, and spending related to visiting a park.
- **Ecosystem Benefits** – Green space adds environmental value through grass, trees, water, and vegetation. Balancing green space with built space helps a community be resilient through weather and climate changes, and after natural disasters. Open ground, swamps and space for water to gather prevent floods while trees hold soil and hillsides in place. After an earthquake when the built environment is unstable an open park space may be the safest area to send residents.
- **Community Gathering Spaces** – Public parks bring people together, fostering social cohesion and enabling a shared community identity. Increasing citizen interaction by encouraging mingling and sharing an open space builds identity and fosters communication across ages and walks of life. A nice park open to all

increases fairness across economic strata of the community, and benefits all the other sectors by allowing all ages and walks of life to use the space together.

- **Visually Appealing Community** – Attractive green space adds visual appeal to a community, fostering community pride of place.

#### **Citations:**

- How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development  
<https://www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/economicdevelopment.htm>
- Uniting the Built and Natural Environments <http://dirt.asla.org/2009/08/28/the-economic-benefits-of-parks/>
- The Economic Impact of Parks  
[http://www.cprs.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=385:economic-impact-of-parks&catid=101:vip-mission-areas&Itemid=59](http://www.cprs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=385:economic-impact-of-parks&catid=101:vip-mission-areas&Itemid=59)
- Improving Parks and Other Community Facilities <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/physical-social-environment/parks-community-facilities/main>
- Rejuvenating Neighborhoods and Communities Through Parks  
[http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications\\_and\\_Research/Research/Papers/Rejuvenating-Neighborhoods-White-Paper.pdf](http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/Rejuvenating-Neighborhoods-White-Paper.pdf)

## **Safe Community**

- None of the above activities will matter if the community does not feel safe engaging in them. This includes both physical and emotional safety, and both infrastructure such as park night lighting and social structure such as Neighborhood Watch and anti-bullying programs. Though keeping the community safe many proactive efforts must be implemented in order to ensure that spaces and participants are safe for all users.

#### **Outcomes:**

- **100% Swim Ready** – Learning to swim is a vital for all residents, especially this close to the ocean. Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional death or injury for children 0 – 14 and of those 9% are boating accidents, where the person never anticipated being in the water. (Centers for Disease Control) The goal of any community near the ocean is that 100% of children learn to swim.

- **Equipment Safety** – Safe equipment is vital for all ages using parks and sports complexes. Park playgrounds should be inspected weekly. Though young children fall, and sports can result in injuries, the goal of the community is for all sports and play facilities to be as safe as possible. This includes proper maintenance of facilities and equipment, regular inspections, and a clear method of reporting and acting on problems.
- **Emotional Safety** – Programs that bring people together and teach help foster how to get along with one another are cornerstones of the programs. Whether it's providing safe programs for latch-key kids or kids needing childcare to attend. Or a facility where teens can go and know they won't be picked on or bullied. Or a center that provides programs for senior citizens who would otherwise have nowhere to go and no one to interact with.
- **Emergencies** – Staff must be prepared to assist the public in an emergency. Staff should be routinely trained in safety and expected to assist the public in need. This includes training in CPR and use of Automated External Defibrillators', as well as placing AED units in locations such as the Katy Geissert Civic Center Library, Benstead Plunge, Bartlett Senior Center and Sea Aire Golf Course.
- **Enforcement** – All communities need to partner with the local police force in order to patrol community facilities in an effort to identify problems and hazards, deter negative behavior, and monitor the use of the facilities.

#### **Citations:**

- Centers for Disease Control  
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control  
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Playground-Injuries/>

