A CASE STUDY OF PREVENTION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SHARED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Build Public Support for Creating Community Spaces for Youth

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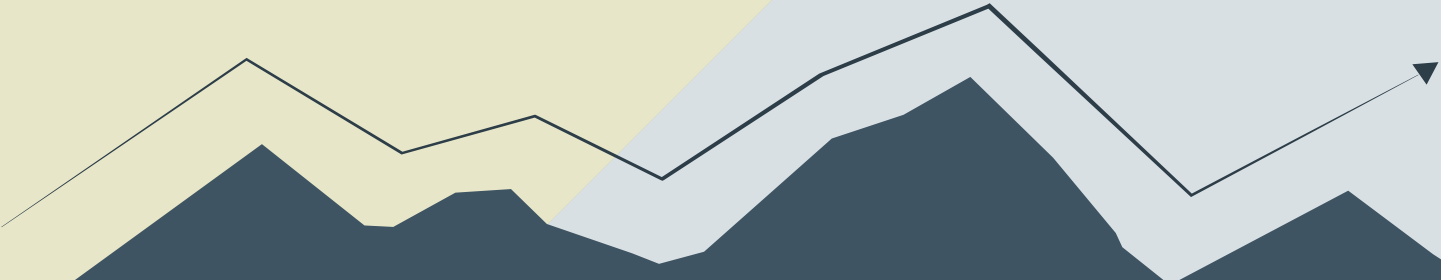
CDPHE

Introduction

In recent years, Colorado community coalitions leveraging the Communities That Care (CTC) model implemented evidence-based upstream prevention strategies to address shared risk and protective factors that impact health and behavior outcomes. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), researchers on the Technical Assistance and Evaluation team at the University of Colorado Anschutz's Colorado School of Public Health (the CU team) directly supported communities implementing CTC and prevention strategies. As part of this support, the CU team collected data from communities who implemented a prevention strategy to Build Public Support for Creating Community Spaces for Youth (Community Spaces).

The goal of this data collection effort was to highlight best practices and challenges faced by communities implementing this prevention strategy. This case study report was produced to help any community organizing for prevention to gain a deeper understanding of how the prevention strategy works in practice. This report provides valuable information based on community lived experience by noting strategy successes and challenges.

Communities organizing for prevention can use the best practices featured in this report in the planning and implementation of prevention strategies locally. In addition, awareness of common issues and pitfalls can help set up other communities for success and streamline progress.

In January 2021, the CU team began collecting data from pre-recorded affinity group (prevention strategy) meetings and focus group interviews. Data analysis began in April 2021, and final reports were written in August 2021. Of note is that prevention strategy implementation largely occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is important context surrounding the challenges experienced by communities. Analysis of focus group interviews and prevention strategy meetings revealed best practices that encouraged the success of the strategy.

Following is a summary of the results, and major themes are discussed in more detail in this report.

Valuing collaboration from the start; capitalizing on your community's characteristics, focusing on youth, being strategic about the implementation plan, and creating systems change and planning for sustainability were all things that led to the success of the strategy. However, COVID-19, political changes, balancing different priorities, and working out logistics of activities were challenges encountered by the communities implementing this work.

Methods

This project aimed to collect data from prevention strategy meetings and focus group interviews about evidence-based upstream prevention strategy implementation to focus on the experiences of Colorado community coalitions and highlight best practices and challenges. The results featured in this case study report can assist communities organizing for prevention in current or future implementation efforts.

Focus group interviews were conducted with community members involved in the Community Spaces prevention strategy that had been implemented locally for more than six months.

Audio recordings of interviews and prevention strategy meetings were transcribed with transcription software and reviewed for accuracy.

Transcripts were examined for meaningful statements and phrases, which were noted using a defined code. All statements that embodied each code were analyzed for overarching ideas and themes.

Major themes were separated into two distinct categories highlighting the prevention strategy's

1. Best Practices
2. Challenges experienced during implementation

In addition, communities offered recommendations for success for other communities planning to implement this strategy in the future.

Acknowledgements

Strategy Results:
Community Spaces for Youth

Recommendations for Community Spaces for Youth

- Know your why and let it drive the project. Keeping it on the forefront lets you refer back to it when you get stuck.

- Have youth not only involved in the project but leadings its development and implementation.

- A strong lead in these efforts help keep the project on task.

- Create accountability among implementers also that everyone stays on top of what they needto do.

- It's important to bring the right people at the right time-you don't just want anyone, but thepeople with the right skills and experience.

Best Practices

Value Collaboration from the Start

Coalitions cannot do all of the work alone. When you collaborate with others you can leverage everyone's strengths. Other agencies or community groups could be skilled in mapping (GIS), have lived experience, or be subject matter experts that can really help to bolster the strategy work. Collaborating with other community groups and agencies is a great way to share responsibilities and resources, and work toward collective impact.

Focus on Community Characteristics

Your community is unique with its own culture, infrastructure, and norms. Coalitions found that using their communities' characteristics helped them implement this strategy. For example, smaller communities where members have relationships and connections throughout the community helped push the work further and can increase inclusion of diverse populations.

Partner with Youth

Creating safe community spaces for youth can't happen without youth being at the table. No one knows more about where the youth feel safe, where they would want to hang out, or the barriers that they face better than the youth themselves. Partnering with existing youth councils or youth advisors can meaningfully engage youth in the process. With the help of youth, one community found that a major barrier was access to community spaces was transit – so they created a Youth Ride Free transit pass.

Be Strategic about the Implementation Plan

How you set up your implementation plan and how much you reflect on it is an important part of its development. Building in small and big wins by having monthly goals that guide toward longer-term goals keeps people motivated to continue working on the project. Creating an interactive board, like a jamboard or a poster board, where everyone can see the progress that is being made was noted as helpful to strategically moving implementation efforts forward.

Systems Change and Sustainability

It's important to have a long-term mindset when addressing this strategy. Coalitions should think through what it takes for the project to continue in case the initiative stops receiving funding. What systems changes or culture shifts are needed to ensure sustainability? What are you going to do if there is turnover? These are some questions that can help build capacity as well as develop long-lasting internal and external procedures.

Challenges

COVID-19 Impacts

Coalitions could not predict the COVID-19 pandemic, and it impacted strategies in many ways. The pandemic didn't stop the work from moving forward but it did change the nature of the work. Communities re-prioritized their efforts and thought more about sustainability by always keeping funding in the forefront.

Political Changes

Our local political system has influence on how policies are passed in our communities. When these changes in local politics happen, coalitions will need to think strategically about how to re-engage in this new system and adapt to any changes.

Balancing Priorities

There are so many paths that we may want to travel down to achieve the goal of building support for creating safer community spaces for youth. Coalitions found that you can't do it all and it's important to put things on the back burner when it's not the right time for something to happen.

Activities and Action Steps

There are some activities that involve more planning than originally anticipated. For example, creating a video that features youth has a lot of moving parts. Getting parental consent, providing transportation to youth, and looking for funding sources are all action steps that need to be thought through before moving too far ahead. Communities took time to pause some efforts and reassess to make sure they had everything worked out before moving forward again.