Brownfields to Healthfields for Family Mental Health

How are Brownfields to Healthfields and Family Mental Health Connected?

Achieving family mental health (FMH) through Brownfields to Healthfields (B2H) has multiple benefits, including triple bottom line justice (TBLJ), for children, mothers, families, and communities. These benefits include housing, food security, health care, and reduced exposure to contamination and blight which all support FMH. A whole-of-government/society approach to B2H that places communities directly impacted by brownfields at the center can lead to improved FMH.

**Triple Bottom Line Justice** is an integrated policy and place-based practices methodology that simultaneously tackles health, environmental, and economic challenges faced by overburdened, underserved, and underrepresented communities. TBLJ advances health and behavioral wellness while supporting economic mobility and environmental sustainability.

**KEY MESSAGES**

**UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS ABOUT BROWNFIELDS AND FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH**

Brownfields are any “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant”1. Common contaminants include petroleum, lead-based paint, asbestos, substances used in illegal drug manufacturing (e.g., meth), or other environmental contaminants like farm waste. There are more than 450,000 brownfields in the United States1.

Environmental, economic, social, and health disparities affect communities living near brownfields. The effects are far-reaching and include increased crime rates, loss of social capital, substance abuse, lack of green spaces or areas for recreation, decreased access to healthy foods, poor air quality, contaminated soil or water, elevated blood-lead levels, and asthma prevalence2. These effects all have direct or indirect effects on the mental health of families living near brownfields. Brownfield redevelopment can improve family mental health by increasing green space and social interaction and by reducing the stress of living near contamination2.

Government Brownfields Programs: Federal (i.e., U.S. EPA) and State governments operate Brownfields programs that empower states, communities, and other stakeholders to work together to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. Revitalizing brownfield sites creates benefits throughout the community3. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests more than $1.5 billion through EPA’s Brownfields Program with $1.2 billion in project grants and $300 million to state and tribal response programs. With EPA’s funding and direct technical assistance, overburdened communities can address the economic, social, and environmental challenges caused by brownfields and reposition these properties for investment and revitalization4.

Common brownfield sites include abandoned gas stations, landfills, former mines, maintenance yards, landfills, and more. B2H transforms these sites into infrastructure that meets basic needs.

Brownfields to Healthfields (B2H) is a community created, multi-stakeholder collaborative and inclusive approach that transforms brownfields into areas that strengthen community health, equity, sustainability, and resilience for overburdened and underserved populations5. It leverages government funding with philanthropic and private investment in impacted communities to flip contaminated properties and blight into community assets. B2H revitalizes communities by increasing access to basic needs, removing blight, and reducing exposure to contaminants. B2H’s community-centric approach provides multiple benefits for children, mothers, families, and communities. Ultimately, B2H is a TBLJ approach that can improve FMH by developing equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities with secure health care, food, housing, clean energy, and transportation.
B2H SUCCESS STORY CASE STUDY

MOUNT TRASHMORE TO MOUNT GROWMORE IN BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

Mount Trashmore was a 35-foot-high mountain of waste that covered 2.5 acres as a former municipal landfill in the heart of the East End of Bridgeport, CT. For years, areas of the landfill would combust, and the smell bothered residents. The community was also a food desert, with high rates of obesity. The landfill attracted rodents, which along with the contaminants in the landfill, were a public health risk. The East End community came together to secure remediation of contamination and develop a vision to create the Mount Growmore Hydroponic Farm and Wellness Campus applying the B2H approach. Through the leadership of Congressman Jim Himes, a major victory was achieved when the East End NRZ Market & Café with the East End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone received a $1,000,000 Congressional Earmark to support construction of Mt. Growmore. The Mt. Growmore Campus will have hydroponic containers and traditional greenhouses on site that provide year-round access to micro greens and leafy vegetables. And, supported by the Yale Elevate Policy Lab, it will provide services and training, including but not limited to maternal mental health, trauma recovery, civic justice engagement training, women’s entrepreneurship and small business incubator, and 3D/VR environmental justice STEM education. Contaminated sites like Mt. Trashmore are stressors and sources of adversity that impose physical and mental health challenges for families. The transformation of Mt. Trashmore to Mt. Growmore exemplifies how B2H can go beyond traditional brownfield redevelopment to improve the physical, social, and family mental health of an entire community and equitably build individual and community resiliency.

Mt. Trashmore to Mt. Growmore

References