

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.

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.

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

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 populations². 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.

HISTORY OF B2H

B2H was launched with the Willa Carson Health and Wellness Center in Clearwater, Florida. Willa Carson, a retired nurse, wanted to meet the health needs of uninsured and under-served children and families in her community. Leveraging EPA funding for leaking underground storage tank removal, the community worked with diverse stakeholders to turn the properties of an abandoned gas station and old apartments into a free community health clinic. Since then, B2H has been applied in underserved communities for basic needs such as mental and vision health, parks and community centers, and grocery stores and community gardens.



Photo courtesy of <https://www.willacarson.org/>

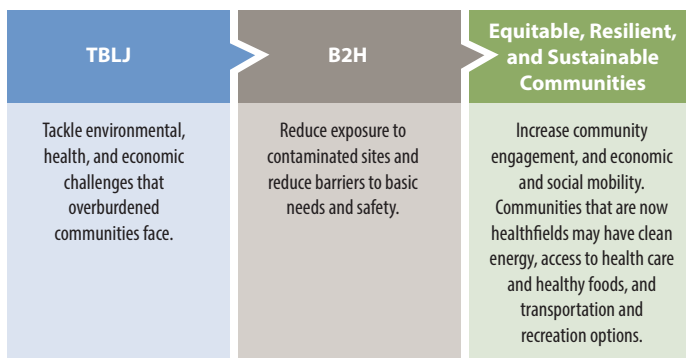
WHAT CAN WE DO?

★ **Policymakers** can incorporate family mental health in decision-making on grants by considering adverse impacts from blight associated with brownfields and the beneficial impacts for communities with increased community safety and access to basic needs (e.g., nutritious foods and health care).

★ **Practitioners** can engage providers of family mental health care (e.g., hospitals, health systems, federally qualified health centers) as collaborators in brownfields redevelopment projects while working with impacted populations to ensure that services are accessible.

★ **Communities** can conduct walking tours in their neighborhood to identify properties that are blighted and may be contaminated. They can then work with local governments to seek federal and state funding for remediation and redevelopment of the properties into uses that advance community well-being, resilience, and sustainability.

THEORY OF CHANGE: TBLJ and B2H meet basic needs and safety including clean energy, food security, health care, safe housing, and transportation/physical activity. Healthfield redevelopment can include medical centers, housing, farmers' markets, schools, community centers, and more.



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, CT⁵. For years, areas of the landfill would combust, and the smell bothered residents⁵. The community was also a food desert, with high rates of obesity⁶. 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. Growmore⁷. 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



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