



Bridging the Gap: Increasing Community Public Safety Through Youth Well-being

***by
Crime and Public Safety Immersion Team 2023***

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Introduction and The Problem

Crime and threats to public safety impact ALL communities. While the reasons for the prevalence (both perceived and existent) of crime are varied, it is evident that crime can have numerous and serious public safety implications across the City and the greater Richmond region. There are a host of laws and policies that seek to deter people from committing or punish those that commit a crime. However, there's not significant emphasis on proactively addressing some of the root causes that may lead many, particularly the youth, to engage in criminal behaviors. This lack of emphasis is further perpetuated by the often-overlooked perspective that the concept of public safety also includes one's feeling of "being safe" in their environment which includes threats to one's physical, psychological, and personal well-being.

Call to Action

Providing pathways to local community resources that seek to address the physical, social, and emotional/psychological challenges facing many youth and their families today, we feel, will not only improve one's feelings of "being safe" in their community but can also serve as a bridge to improved youth and community well-being. A youth and family-centric approach that focuses on providing access to resources to help foster a safe, supportive, and healthy environment could lessen the likelihood of youth engaging in risky behaviors that could lead to being the victim or perpetrator of violence and/or a crime.

The Project and Journey

After contemplating for some time among our team and interviewing key public safety professionals in the region on the question "What is public safety?", we all concluded that this concept is at its core related to a person's sense of feeling safe in their environment. Based on our individual and collective experiences, we each felt that basic as well as more multifaceted physical, psychological, and social obstacles to a person's well-being can influence one's feelings of safety – for themselves and their community.

Combining the knowledge of our team members we determined that the focus of our project was to research a wide range of support related organizations in the City and develop a comprehensive "resource guide" that can be used as a tool to connect school-aged youth and their families. We recommend deploying this resource guide at schools within two distinct zip codes, 23219 and 23224, in the City. These specific codes, both north and south of the James River, were selected because of the varied socio-economic conditions within these areas. This resource guide is recommended to be used by Communities in Schools (CIS) or guidance counselor staff – working in Richmond Public Schools – to reach youth and their families most in need.

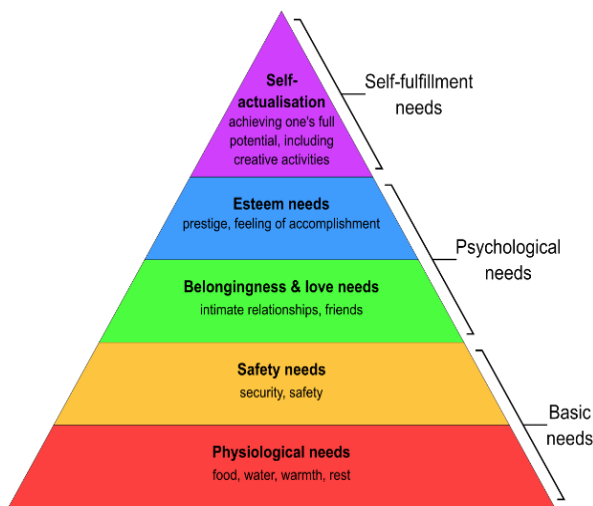
Framework

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory states that people move through different stages of five needs that motivate one's behavior. Significant disparities and lack of basic needs in this hierarchy can lead to unfavorable outcomes for youth, their families, and ultimately the entire community. However, we seek a more inclusive and relevant framework where one's needs are not conditional on hierarchy. We introduce an alternative framework of looking at essential needs that are critical to every person's well-being. A framework that is more inclusive and holistic - The Five Domains. The five domains are:

- **Social Connectedness:** The degree to which a person has relationships that allow her or him to give and receive information, emotional support, and material aid; create a sense of belonging and value; and foster growth.
- **Safety:** The degree to which a person can be her or his authentic self and not be at heightened risk of physical or emotional harm.
- **Stability:** The degree to which a person can expect her or his situation and status to be fundamentally the same from one day to the next; where there is adequate predictability for a person to concentrate on the here-and-now and on the future, and where small obstacles do not set off big cascades.
- **Mastery:** The degree to which we feel influence over our future and the decisions we make, and where we experience some correlation between efforts and outcomes.
- **Meaningful Access to Relevant Resources:** The degree to which a person can meet needs particularly important for her or his situation in ways that are not overly onerous, and are not degrading or dangerous.

Well-being is ultimately about people being whole - living a satisfied and fulfilled life that is good for the person.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



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Full Frame Initiative, 2015

Proposed Recommendation

Youth who experience poverty, homelessness, physical and mental health challenges, and exposure to community violence have higher rates of becoming justice-involved. Rather than focusing simply on problems, we propose a shift to well-being to help youth make positive, lasting change.

The focus is on preventative measures to support school-aged youth, with a concentration in six key areas. **By surrounding youth and families with supportive neighborhoods, communities, services and systems will help provide critical pathways to support the well-being of children and families.**

Personal (Hygiene) and Clothing - Studies have shown that the most vulnerable populations, particularly those living in poverty, likely do not have access to quality hygiene products. Some youth even skip school (or work) because they do not have access to necessary hygiene products. Resources focused on providing personal hygiene products and clothing can help increase confidence, employability, comfort, and one's overall physical and psychological health.

Housing - According to 2016 data from Eviction Lab, Richmond ranks number two in the United States for highest eviction rates. For school-aged children in particular, housing instability leads to a cascade of other problems such as school disruption, food insecurity, falling behind and even school disciplinary problems. Maintaining housing stability leads to better outcomes overall for the child, including fewer school disruptions, better academic performance, and better chances of graduating.

Food - As one of the foundational human needs, we need to promote where food can be secured in a safe and respectful manner. One of many resources in the Richmond area which provides access to community food resources based on location zip code is www.feedmore.org.

Mental Health (Trauma and Crisis Intervention) - Mental health services within Richmond (and beyond) have been strained to a breaking point in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The most significant problem facing youth mental health community in the city is a long waiting list and a lack of diversity among providers. Youth fare best when working with individuals that have a sense of relatability to their experiences. Navigating support for youth can be difficult when parents/caretakers themselves have unresolved trauma and mental health needs.

Well-being and Wellness - To aid in the ability for youth to thrive, it is important to increase positive childhood experiences and provide them and their families with access to relevant resources. Creating spaces where young people feel safe and supported reduces the risk of physical and mental health issues and increases wellbeing. Resources are focused on enhancing youth wellness habits, include physical activity, spiritual and emotional health.

Community Engagement – Positive outcomes for youth rely heavily on the influences in their lives. According to the CDC, one of the ways to prevent adverse childhood experiences is to “connect youth to caring adults and activities.” Resources include after school care, career pathing for youth, low-cost or free extracurricular activities and translation services to serve non-English speaking communities.

Implementation and Next Steps

We recommend piloting the distribution of our network resource guide in a Richmond City Public School that currently utilizes the CIS program. The guide is ideal for CIS staff - several whom we surveyed indicated that a resource guide that can be accessed easily and quickly would be very beneficial - in order to connect youth to services that best meet their needs. This listing can be used for those facing challenges personally, at home, or in their community. We suggest that CIS users determine the guide's effectiveness and whether it has positively impacted lives. Additionally,

staff/personnel should determine how this guide can be improved to better understand and help those in need. It is our hope that this guide can be expanded and used in other schools in the City and throughout the region.

In addition to developing a physical resource guide document we've also created a website to enhance the accessibility of the community resources to ALL. This website can also be accessed via QR code for more immediate and ease of access.

Website address: <https://www.wellbeingrva.com/home>



Qr Code:

Conclusion

The physical, social, and psychological conditions and challenges that many youth and their families face in Richmond can impact an individual's and a community's overall well-being. Likewise, these same conditions can lead to more catastrophic consequences of potentially becoming a victim of or possibly being involved in a crime - all of which impacts one's views of feeling safe. Regardless of our diverse histories, backgrounds, cultures and perspectives, we all share a set of universal needs: social connectedness to people and communities to have a sense of belonging and experience reciprocity; the safety of being able to express core parts of our identify without being in physical or emotional danger; the stability from having enough predictability in our lives that we can plan for the future and know that small obstacles won't create chaos; the experience of mastery that comes from knowing our own efforts can pay off and we have opportunities for control and choice in our own lives; and meaningful access to relevant resources to meet our basic needs without shame, danger, or undue hardship. Our recommended listing of community resources aims to connect available and often free resources to the community, thereby positively impacting public safety and individual and community well-being. We were amazed by the amount of positive work and community relief efforts led and organized by a significant number of nonprofits and community organizations in the City and greater Richmond region. Fostering systems that support well-being will help create pathways for lasting change in the lives of school-aged youth, in turn increasing a sense of safety for youth, their families and community.

Sources

Project Background & Well-being

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Food Resources:

<https://feedmore.org/find-food/help-for-today/>

Community Engagement:

Adverse childhood experiences and life opportunities: Shifting the narrative

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