



Building Community Resilience: Missouri-Kansas (MO-Kan)

November 2019

“Since joining the Building Community Resilience national learning collaborative and network, our work to activate our communities to heal has continued to grow with more partners coming to the table to engage in deeper relationships to disrupt the proliferation of the adversity experienced in our communities.” – Jennifer Brinkman, President, Alive and Well Communities

MO-Kan’s Core BCR Team

In Spring of 2018, Alive and Well Communities (AWC) [joined the national Building Community Resilience learning collaborative and network](#) to lead their initiative across a multi-state region spanning Missouri, Kansas, and Illinois. AWC – comprised of Alive and Well Kansas City and Alive and Well St. Louis - helps communities design, implement and sustain their vision for becoming trauma informed and resilient – creating a network of diverse partners largely based in Kansas City and St. Louis. BCR serves as a central strategy and organizing platform to expand the initiative’s efforts to prevent childhood adversity and achieve equity across communities.

The work of Alive and Well is propelled by deep community engagement that includes extensive training and technical assistance to foster change in organizations and ultimately larger systems. AWC’s priorities are governed by steering committees in St. Louis and Kansas City, whose members represent a variety of sectors, including health and behavioral health, education, grassroots organizations, and health departments. Each Steering Committee oversees and represents the wisdom of their respective *Community Council*, which is comprised of nearly 500 volunteer “Ambassadors” from the local community. Any resident of Kansas City or the St. Louis regions are encouraged to partner with AWC and become an Ambassador.

AWC Ambassadors are agents of change working to increase community resilience and decrease the impact of trauma and toxic stress. Ambassadors represent themselves, their neighborhoods, and/or their professional organizations in health care, education, behavioral health, business, social service, and more. Despite distinct lived-experiences and backgrounds, Ambassadors share a common goal: to help promote healing, wellbeing, equity, and resilience. Ambassadors commit to participate in trauma-awareness training – along the path to becoming fully trauma-informed – and to connect and collaborate at quarterly events and engage their community and/or organizations to build a resilient, trauma-informed city and state.

What is Building Community Resilience?

Building Community Resilience (BCR) is a national network and learning collaborative that seeks to improve the health and life outcomes of children, families, and communities. Teams in six regions across the country are using the BCR process and tools to help their communities not only ‘bounce back’ in the face of adversity, but bounce forward. Over the past four years, BCR teams have helped build and strengthen the buffers that can prevent negative outcomes associated with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), particularly in the context of adverse community environments (ACEs)—the [Pair of ACEs](#).

Using the BCR process and tools, teams work to align large systems with one another—such as health care, city government, and education—and also with community-based partners, including parenting support services and grassroots health advocacy. Teams also develop strategies – from implementing trauma-informed practices to data sharing and advocating for policy change – that bolster strengths, fill gaps, and ultimately build child, family, and community resilience. Teams identify community strengths and gaps, work in partnership with community not on community, develop a shared understanding of adversities and goals, and identify concrete policy asks to pursue. The teams use the BCR tools and resources, including the BCR Coalition Building and Communications Guide, the Partner Build Grow Action Guide, and the Policy & Advocacy Guide, all of which are also free to the public.

BCR is part of the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at the George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health. The national BCR team at GW provides technical assistance, including strategic planning, facilitation of cross-sector information sharing, support for data and measurement, development of policy strategies, convening, and communications support.



The Community Context

Communities in Missouri, Kansas and Illinois recognize that many of the adversities they face – from epidemic levels of addiction and community violence to poor educational and health outcomes – have a common root cause: trauma and toxic stress. Communities and individuals experience adversities, from traumas experienced in the home, such as exposure to substance abuse or domestic violence, to the traumas associated with living in areas of concentrated poverty, discrimination, and the lasting impacts of racism.

Segregated and unsafe neighborhoods in the urban core of St. Louis and Kansas City have long-standing inequities in access to economic mobility, and historically include some of the poorest health outcomes in the country, from tobacco use to chronic disease. Both cities have a long history of racial tensions and stark racial disparities. These disparities are demonstrated in racial inequities across housing, health, education, and employment. According to the US 2010 American Communities Project, St. Louis and Kansas City are the 7th and 25th most segregated regions in the country, respectively. In Kansas City, these disparities continue to grow due to rapid gentrification in the city's urban core. St. Louis' barren urban core - severely lacking in infrastructure and vitality - has isolated people of color living in this area from resources and networks for decades. Additionally, both Kansas City and St. Louis experience high rates of violence, with both Kansas City and St. Louis ranked in the top ten regions with the highest murder rates in the U.S. (FBI Uniform Crime Report). Following the shooting of Michael Brown, a young African-American man, by a white police officer in Ferguson, MO, the St. Louis region has experienced more urgency in addressing racial tension and inequity, local violence and community unrest.

Across both the St. Louis and Kansas City regions, there is a shared need for healing. Community members, in partnership with Alive and Well Communities, have been working to create pathways to healing. There is a momentum and energy created by dedicated residents and service providers who are working together to implement sustainable change at the neighborhood, organizational and systems levels. This work has resulted in investments by the St. Louis Mental Health Board, the MO Foundation for Health, the REACH Foundation and Health Forward Foundation in Kansas City, and America's Promise Alliance.

Alive and Well Communities: A Collaborative Focus

Through the lens of the Pair of ACEs, Alive and Well Communities is applying the science of trauma and toxic stress to improve family, individual, community, organizational, and systems responses to the region's layers of trauma, with the goal of promoting healing, wellbeing, and equity. AWC is facilitating important shifts in local family-serving systems, changing the question from "What's wrong with you?" to "What's happened to you?" – a key shift in creating trauma-informed communities.

All of AWC's priorities and work are driven by community voice. Current priorities include:

- Creating significant **awareness and common language** about the impact of trauma and toxic stress on individual and community outcomes, and building understanding about resilience and how it leads to healing. This is accomplished through a community impact series, quarterly Ambassador events, widely distributed "trauma awareness" trainings, community empowerment workshops delivered by Community Consultants and comprehensive public information campaigns disseminated over TV, radio, podcasts and social media.
- Recruiting hundreds of **Ambassadors** across the region to lead change in their organizations, neighborhoods, places of worship, etc.
- **Capacity building through training** for mental health providers, educators and organizations to enable them to offer evidence-based, trauma-specific interventions to the communities they serve, as well as trainings to address their secondary trauma, including education and self-care techniques. AWC has transitioned to a combination of grant-funded and fee-for-service revenue model, where training and technical assistance sustains community engagement and ultimately, the movement to create trauma-informed and resilient communities.
- **Consulting** with organizations to adopt the *Missouri Model*, a developmental framework for addressing the impact of trauma and creating trauma-informed organizations. The model was created by the MO Department of Health and the MO State Trauma Roundtable, and has been demonstrating improved outcomes in local

organizations. Currently, several educators in the St. Louis Region have developed a Schools Guidance document, which provides educators guidance how to implement the MO Model and begin the journey to become trauma informed.

- **Establishing and supporting learning collaboratives for professionals in multiple sectors including education, health, and justice.**

Alive and Well St. Louis

To date, AWC St. Louis has provided nearly 600 trauma trainings in a range of settings including schools, health care, and social service -- reaching more than 20,000 individuals - including all staff in St. Louis Public Schools. The St. Louis team has also been working to support several organizations implementing [Seeking Safety](#), an evidence-based, trauma-specific intervention that addresses trauma histories and substance use among community members. Additionally, AWC St. Louis hired a team of 15 Community Consultants to share information about toxic stress, the Pair of ACEs, self-care, and community care to residents of the "Promise Zone", a federally designated area of concentrated poverty in the East St. Louis, IL and Hazelwood, MO region. All community consultants are residents of the communities they are serving. This work is entering its third year, where Consultants will work to establish place-based Ambassadors that will work collaboratively to address traumatic issues impacting their communities.

Alive and Well Kansas City

AWC Kansas City has recruited a diverse coalition of stakeholders to the AWC Kansas City Community Council and Steering Committee. The Steering Committee developed their plan for 2019, focusing on building common language and understanding among Ambassadors and activating Ambassadors to address the Pair of ACEs. In doing so, the group launched a very successful impact series addressing the intersection of trauma and racism experienced by black women in the healthcare system, trauma and sex trafficking, and trauma and immigration. They have launched the second round of the impact series for 2019, implemented Coffee Conversations hosted by Ambassadors, and is working with local organizations to host a Common Language Conference.

Growing Alive and Well Communities

AWC has entered into a contract to bring its model to East St. Louis, Illinois where they have developed a learning collaborative of 10 organizations that are working to become trauma informed, provided trauma awareness training to more than 140 East St. Louis residents and service providers and hired and trained four residents to deliver Community Empowerment Workshops to their neighbors. Additionally, Alive and Well has supported the development of the work in Jefferson County, Missouri; and is working with school districts in the southeast region of Missouri.

The Role of BCR

As a member of the national BCR collaborative, AWC learns from, teaches and co-creates best practice with the other four BCR teams in the collective working to address the Pair of ACEs through the BCR process. Through in-person and virtual meetings with the other BCR teams around the country, AWC shares successes as well as challenges that help shape each BCR site's initiatives. This pioneering work requires exploration, experimentation, and frequent course changes. BCR provides resources and a framework to support information sharing, data collection, outcome measurement, and solution identification. AWC has tapped into BCR's expertise to begin to build relationships with federal and state policymakers, including providing specific education on certain legislative and administrative actions.

Next Steps

AWC continues to deepen its work in communities and in systems, particularly the education, health care and criminal justice sectors. Its models for change, including recruiting and activating Ambassadors to be at the center of designing and leading the change, continue to grow with opportunities for replication.

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