

Best and Promising Practices: Trauma Informed Community Building- A Model for Strengthening Communities in Trauma Affected Neighborhoods

Summary Overview:

Information regarding the Trauma Informed Community Building (TICB) model can be found in the BRIDGE Housing Corporation's most recent white paper: <http://bridgehousing.com/PDFs/TICB.Paper5.14.pdf>

The Trauma Informed Community Building (TICB) model is based on BRIDGE Housing Corporation's experience doing community building work over the past five years in the Potrero Terrace and Annex public housing sites in San Francisco, CA. BRIDGE Housing Corporation used the TICB model in Potrero to prepare for a major redevelopment of the property. Potrero is one of San Francisco's largest and most distressed public housing sites; BRIDGE Housing worked with residents, and partners developed the TICB model for community building.

Trauma is a set of normal human responses to stressful and threatening experiences (National Center for PTSD, 2007). Residents in low-income and public housing are more prone to experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or cumulative trauma as a result of daily stressors from violence, concentrated poverty, as well as historic structural conditions of racism and disenfranchisement (Collins, et al., 2010). Adults, children, and families are often overwhelmed with trauma as a result of their living conditions. This pervasive- current and historical- trauma requires community building and revitalization that takes into account residents' emotional needs as well as practices to mitigate the possibility of re-traumatizing triggers. Many "traditional" models of community building sometimes ignore or even exacerbate these triggers, making processes such as revitalization, rehabbing, and relocation traumatic for adults and children.

The TICB) model addresses and works around the challenges trauma poses to traditional community building strategies. The TICB model uses "strategies that de-escalate chaos and stress, and build social cohesion and foster community resilience over time" (Weinstein et al., 2014). Using the TICB model in trauma impacted communities ensures community building that will promote community healing as part of housing transformation efforts. The below figure shows how real life application of the TICB model ensures that community building promotes community healing as a part of housing transformation efforts.



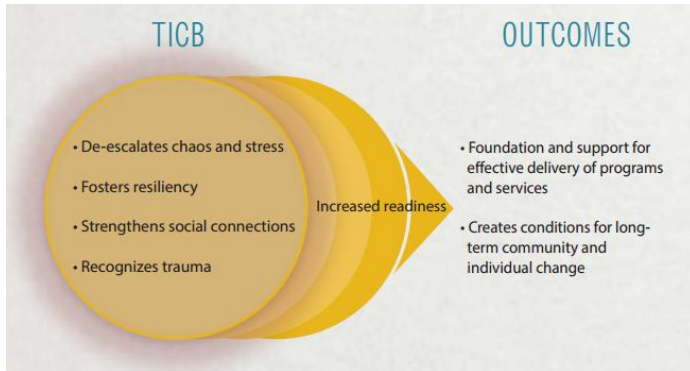
The TICB model addresses five challenges that trauma impacted communities face during transformation efforts:

1. **Lack of trust and social cohesion:** social cohesion is an instrumental element of community building that is absent when trauma has depreciated trusting relationships among adults and children.
2. **Lack of stability, reliability, and consistency:** Engaging and sustaining participation of residents in community building activities is difficult if their capacity is overwhelmed by their need to cope with trauma challenges and survive in poverty.
3. **Disempowerment and lack of a sense of community ownership:** Lacking a sense of community ownership or desire to invest in the collective good are immediate barriers to traditional community building strategies of collaborative planning and vision setting.
4. **Inability to vision the future:** While the involvement of residents in setting goals and strategies is a core principle of “traditional” community building, communities affected by trauma have fewer opportunities to invest in planning their future due to persistent barriers to personal and economic growth.
5. **Breadth and depth of community needs:** Community building progress depends on the strength of social support, which can only develop if individuals receive the support that they need to deal with their own trauma. The many effects of trauma- inability to focus, low self-esteem, shame, or guilt- may inhibit many residents to step up in leadership roles.

The outcomes of effective use of the TICB model are the conditions for sustainable individual and community change. To address the challenges and reach these outcomes, the TICB incorporates four important principles;

1. **Do no harm:** The TICB model encourages practitioners and service providers to be aware of past and current trauma and promote activities, programs, and services that avoid re-traumatizing individuals and families in the community.
2. **Acceptance:** The TICB model encourages practitioners and service providers to meet residents where they are and accept the realities of their community conditions. This process allows practitioners and service providers to set expectations accordingly.
3. **Community Empowerment:** Recognize the importance of self-determination to encourage community investment and that everyone can play a supportive role.
4. **Reflective Process:** The TICB model encourages its users to take a sustained approach over multiple generations to improve outcomes in a trauma impacted community.

The below figure depicts the foundation and support needed for a coordinated program and service delivery system that can address individual and community needs that will lead to desired outcomes mentioned above.



Evidence Base:

A 1997 HUD report offered strategies to put residents at the center of revitalization efforts and encouraged developers, property managers, program staff, and others to actively engage residents in the process of strengthening community institutions and programs. It is now widely accepted that community building efforts in low-income and public housing neighborhoods seeks to counteract the deterioration of social structures and weakened institutions- formal and informal- that support the life of a community. These publications and accepted beliefs led to the support and creation of the TICB model.

Rebuilding Potrero

When San Francisco moved to rebuild Potrero, one of its most distressed public housing developments, they moved forward with eight goals:

1. Ensure no loss of public housing & minimize displacement of existing residents
2. Create economically integrated communities
3. Maximize creation of new affordable housing
4. Involve residents at all levels
5. Provide economic opportunities
6. Integrate development with existing neighborhood plans
7. Create environmentally sustainable, accessible communities
8. Build a strong sense of community

To build community, trust, and involve residents in all facets of redevelopment, BRIDGES Housing Corporation created the Potrero garden program, healthy living program, healthy generations project, and hosted semi-monthly community building groups, community-wide events, and provided leadership academies and opportunities to residents.

Case Study:

The Rebuild Potrero Community Building Initiative has been underway since 2009. Its main focus and goal is to build the capacity of residents in order to improve their quality of life and effect positive change in their community. The partnership created a physical Master Plan for Rebuild Potrero that oriented the streets of the neighborhood (Potrero Terrace and Annex housing sites) by connecting them to local resources, infrastructure, and transportation. Through dozens of workshops, bus tours, and presentations to neighborhood organizations, the Rebuild Potrero team sought to learn from the community and to educate partners on issues such as principles of good design and sustainability.

“Rebuild Potrero” is a community based and centered vision for rebuilding and revitalizing the South Potrero neighborhood. The redevelopment process involved residents, community members, and other Potrero stakeholders in hopes of creating and improving the physical environment of South Potrero but also contributing to the social outcomes for current and future families in the neighborhood.

For more information on rebuilding and revitalizing Potrero, visit this link:

http://www.rebuildpotrero.com/wordpress/?page_id=7

Coordination:

The Trauma Informed Community Building model is one that can be adapted into many different neighborhoods undergoing community change. Because this process is a model, and not a program or funded grant, coordination is open to interpretation in the community deciding to implement the model. Each community should have an understanding of currently available and not available but accessible services and programs that can be used when implementing the TICB model.

In Potrero, the work was in part of San Francisco’s HOPE SF initiative. The HOPE SF initiative was a public-private partnership led by the San Francisco Mayor’s Office.