COMMUNITIES THAT CARE: THE IMPACT OF PREVENTION IN COLORADO

Lessons Learned From Community Mobilizers in 46 Communities

May 2020

COMMUNITIES THAT CARE IN COLORADO

Communities That Care (CTC) is a model that organizes community members from all sectors and backgrounds to unite as a local coalition and use what we know works from science to build healthier communities. The CTC model is a proven intervention with multiple randomized control trials, demonstrating results over 10-15 years of investment. CTC impacts communities over time because it addresses the root causes of violence, substance misuse, and delinquency among youth, and promotes positive development and mental health.

The goal of CTC in Colorado is to give communities the skills they need to make lasting change in their community. CTC builds the capacity of parents, youth, and other community members to identify local problems and promote local solutions to transform their community. As vocal advocates for prevention, they take ownership of local issues and drive funding and decisions toward true community needs and evidence-based solutions.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES TO CREATE HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUTH

1. **Create meaningful opportunities for youth engagement** by implementing recommendations from the State Youth Development Plan providing resources on positive youth development, and supporting communities to create safe local spaces for youth to feel connected and engaged as they connect with trusted adults.

2. **Change community and social norms** about how we model substance use and how we talk about misuse in families and among youth.

3. **Reduce the availability of substances in communities through local policies and enforcement of existing laws**, ensuring youth understand the consequences of their actions in the community, and retail outlets know that laws restricting youth access to substances are enforced.

4. **Encourage district-wide implementation of evidence-based social-emotional learning curricula** to foster self-awareness, self-management, social skills, and responsible decision-making among youth.
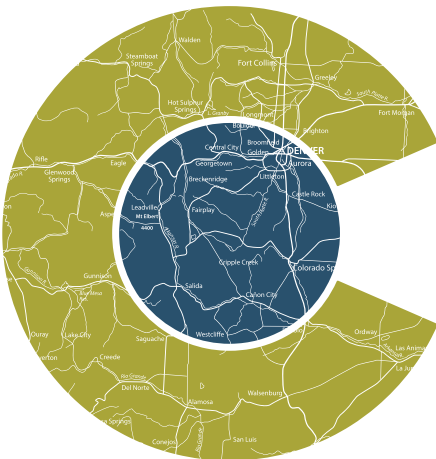
COLORADO CTC IMPACT

- **Colorado CTC is in its fourth year of implementation.**
- **46 Communities across 43 Counties are implementing CTC:**
  - » Rural (35%), Frontier (17%), Urban (45%)
  - » Reaches ~40% of Colorado's population
- **Nearly 1800 community members across CO are engaged in coalitions.**
- **200 youth are involved as decision-makers in coalitions.**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report captures significant changes occurring across 46 communities in Colorado as they use the Communities That Care (CTC) model to build sustainable prevention infrastructures to support youth now and in the future. CTC is a model that organizes community members from all sectors and backgrounds to unite as a local coalition and use what we know works from science to build healthier communities.

CTC BUILDS THE FOUNDATION FOR LOCALLY DRIVEN, LASTING CHANGE

CTC is a catalyst for locally driven, lasting change. At the root of all successful prevention efforts that improve health and social outcomes lies the community's capacity to solve local issues. CTC generates opportunities, builds skills, and activates the public's ability and drive to advocate for change.

"The success of CTC is also in building capacity within our community. There are many other collective impact groups in our community, but CTC does a great job of building people's skills and expertise of how to make a change within the community."

CTC IMPACT IN COLORADO COMMUNITIES

CTC fosters multi-sector communication and collaboration. Community organizations and agencies communicate and partner more, sharing resources, building bridges, and growing a network focused on the common goals of reducing risk and promoting protection in youth.

CTC increases authentic community and youth engagement. Communities across Colorado are uniting over shared goals and forging more authentic connections between adults and youth. Ultimately, this is paving the way for youth to lead in prevention and address the real-world challenges they face every day.

CTC helps bring science to life across communities in Colorado. Communities are increasingly using data to make important local decisions. They are implementing evidence-based programs, practices, and policies aligned to local issues that will create positive, lasting change.

A NOTE ON THESE FINDINGS

Every CTC community coalition is guided by a local community mobilizer. In December of 2019, the community mobilizers were asked the following questions: "What is it about an organized and high capacity coalition that is making lasting change in your community?" and "What change did this multi-year investment in your community start to initiate that you may not have seen otherwise?" Researchers at the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado Boulder iteratively developed a codebook using both deductive and inductive approaches based in grounded theory. The codebook was used to analyze textual responses, and researches then used axial coding to identify patterns across responses.

Source: CTC progress reports for CDPHE from Colorado community mobilizers, December 2019

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CTC FOSTERS MULTI-SECTOR COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION

Coalition members are brought together because they share common concerns and passions for the health of their communities and youth. The CTC framework creates the opportunity for members representing diverse sectors of the community to organize around shared goals. Within this structure, members expand their knowledge and skills on prevention, and share those learnings with the community. Subsequently, the capacity for various sectors to address and align their efforts collectively is developed.

IMPACT

Coalitions are creating an environment where community members, agencies, and youth can come together to create change. The coalition structure is built on engaging diverse community stakeholders, which allows communities to have increasingly direct access to a space where different perspectives are not just valued, but necessary. Setting the stage for people to come together and make connections enables communities to become powerful drivers of change.

> *"The Communities That Care framework has provided an accessible platform in which these interagency conversations and collaboration can take place in a tangible, communal space."*

> *"[Communities That Care] has become a household name in [our town] and, increasingly, prompts systems' and environmental change talk and partnership across diverse community sectors."*

> *"CTC has been holding discussions with key leaders about the need for coordinated action – not just at home or just at school – but action that is coordinated in school, home, community, and youth themselves."*

Communities are building partnerships that will increase the sustainability of prevention and intervention work. Cross-sector and community collaboration are pillars to a coalition's success. Increasing collaboration among diverse stakeholders contributes to the community's ability to build stronger bridges, pool resources, and increase strategic influence to make sustainable change in the community.

> *"Professionals are not as siloed as they once were in their intervention/prevention efforts and professionals are cognizant of ensuring inclusiveness in activities/efforts that impact youth and families in our community."*

> *"People in the community know that if you are looking to collaborate, share funding, or network, that going to a quarterly [CTC Coalition] meeting is a good step."*

> *"The partnerships developed across the county have helped local agencies and community members align their understanding of our local rates of youth substance use and efforts to address the problem from a community perspective. Many of these partnerships would not occur if it were not for the foundational common thread of CTC."*

OUTCOMES

The expansion of multi-sector communication and collaboration has led many communities to effectively advocate for change at the local level. Many coalitions reported their belief that the passing of ordinances related to vaping and youth tobacco use was only possible due to the collaborative infrastructure developed with the support of CTC. For example, one community reported that having a coalition working across sectors led to a more organized and efficient change of local policy to increase the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products to 21 prior to the federal law change.

Source: CTC progress reports for CDPHE from Colorado community mobilizers, December 2019

CTC INCREASES AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Coalitions are developing an infrastructure focused on prevention that establish common goals, values, and language throughout communities. The effectiveness of coalitions is advanced by providing opportunities for new skill development, through trainings like the Social Development Strategy and Positive Youth Development. In contributing to public knowledge of prevention methods, and building skills to authentically involve youth, community-wide engagement becomes increasingly accessible.

IMPACT

Communities are building relationships that are creating long-lasting community bonds. In building a shared understanding of local needs, CTC is contributing to an increased sense of unity, trust, and belonging within communities. Community members are strengthening their connections to one another, and their investment in the community.

> *"Beginning to align our goals as a community has created a broader understanding of how all organizations in the City can impact the health and well-being of all residents."*

> *"Our work helps our overall community create connections and bonds that are deeper than a passing greeting on the street."*

Communities are changing their perception of youth in the community. With increased exposure to Positive Youth Development, communities recognize the importance of youth voice and participation. Increasing youth presence in a variety of capacities has changed how adults in the community perceive youth.

> *"It's been amazing to see the paradigm shift in how adults view youth. Youth are now viewed as a resource, are valued and treated as equals."*

> *"The Positive Youth Development trainings have created a movement of shared positive language, engaging youth as partners, and fostering youth-adult connections. Understanding what authentic youth leadership means and looks like has grown significantly through our CTC efforts."*

Youth are using their voices to advocate for change in their communities. CTC embraces 'nothing about us, without us,' representing the importance of engaging youth not just to contribute to the work, but to lead it. Subsequently, youth have developed skills to effectively advocate for change in their communities.

> *"I have witnessed a student share their mental health struggles and offering suggestions to key leaders for needed systemic improvements; I have proudly watched young people create policy change."*

> *"Youth have begun to sit on planning boards, participate in interviews, provide input into community plans, participate in feedback for grants written by the school district, and speak to our city council members and the [Rotary Club] about why youth voice should be valued and included in all work done in [our city]."*

OUTCOMES

The increased diversity of voices involved in community decision-making has contributed to the strength of local advocacy efforts. One community specifically identified youth involvement as critical in the passing of vaping ordinances, while another referenced the importance of community-wide engagement in passing a needle exchange/harm reduction program.

Source: CTC progress reports for CDPHE from Colorado community mobilizers, December 2019

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CTC HELPS BRING SCIENCE TO LIFE

Inherent in the CTC model is the use of data to inform action. Coalitions support communities by generating shared language around prevention efforts, contributing to a data-driven understanding of local needs, and implementing evidence-based prevention programs, practices, and policies to create positive and sustainable change. In representing and publicizing the effectiveness of applying science to practice, coalitions empower their larger community to adopt the same approaches to prevention.

IMPACT

Communities are increasingly valuing the role of data in local decision-making. Multiple communities demonstrated a shift in their perception of the importance of data, recognizing its strength as a tool to inform strategy and action. This was especially evident in the decision among schools in many communities to use data to guide the development of their community action plans.

> *"Before January of 2017 no coalition or community group was actively and exclusively focused on youth prevention and reducing risk factors/increasing protective factors for our youth. For the first time, data have been shared broadly in the community and risk and protective factors have been identified."*

> *"With the help of CTC efforts, schools in our county understand the importance of collecting and sharing youth data from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS). Prior to 2017, only one school released their HKCS data. In 2017, one of our districts excluded two grades from taking the survey. Now for the 2019 administration, students from all grades in our five biggest middle and high schools took the survey."*

> *"In all, 22 schools [in our school district] participated in the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey using an opt-out procedure. In 2017 14 schools participated, but they used an opt-in procedure. This change from an opt-in to an opt-out procedure, as well as scaling up the survey to more schools, happened through the advocacy of CTC coalition members and a dedication to the core value of collecting and using data to find community needs and assets."*

Communities are more widely using data and enacting evidence-based strategies and practices. Data has become a driver for action, providing many communities with newfound insight into what issues exist at the local level, and how to implement effective strategies and programs in response.

> *"Another success of [our coalition] has been the intention of building out each strategy based on the data obtained from the Health Kids [Colorado] Survey."*

> *"The targeted data collection has created a useful resource for many agencies in the community to draw upon to support their needs in regards to grant applications and beyond."*

OUTCOMES

The increased presence and use of data has contributed to an increase in general community awareness and mobilization around advancing local issues. Multiple communities found success in basing their advocacy efforts in evidence. For example, coalition members and youth around the state have presented research and observations of community needs to local key leaders. These efforts have successfully informed community changes around tobacco and nicotine regulations, as well as licensing requirements and enforcement policies for retailers.

Source: CTC progress reports for CDPHE from Colorado community mobilizers, December 2019

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