

## **Hands-on Support Boosts Young Men to New Heights**

**Oakland, CA February 25, 2014.** Like many young men of color growing up in East Oakland, Jason, now 18, recalls the violence in his neighborhood and the gang culture. He remembers, "I grew up in a rough neighborhood. We had to get down on the ground when people were shooting." Jason also describes his deep exposure to gang culture. "I never wanted to be in a gang but I had many friends who were in a gang. One of them just got killed in a double homicide last year."

Similarly, Tomas was only 10 years old when he came with his father from El Salvador to make a new life in Oakland; it was a difficult transition. Tomas, explains, "I was having a hard time with my family. My father had no time for me and my mom was in El Salvador. I spent most of my time with my friends in a gang." He further explains, "There were rival gangs in the neighborhood. It was hard for me to walk the streets."

These stories are not uncommon among young men of color in many of Oakland's poorest neighborhoods. Families, with little to no support networks, lack of financial opportunities, insufficient time to parent and often victims of violence themselves, are unable to fully provide their children with the supports necessary to be successful.

The data picture for these young men of color is grim: they are exposed to violence and trauma at an early age, become disconnected from school, have low graduation rates, experience disproportionate contacts with the juvenile justice system, and have few viable economic opportunities to move out of poverty. According to the California Department of Education, African American and Latino youth accounted for 53% of the Oakland Unified School District drop outs in 2012. Additionally, 73% of homicide victims were men of color and African American males comprised 66% of homicide victims in Alameda County in 2010. Furthermore, according to Alameda County Probation Department data, 45% of juveniles on probation in 2012 resided in Oakland, 84% of who were African American and Latino young men.

It is also estimated that the wealth and employment gap between white men and men of color is also large, with Latinos making \$16,635 per year on average, for instance, compared to white men's average earnings of \$45,071 per year.

Mayor Jean Quan states, "We applaud President Obama and his administration for championing the new Men and Boys of Color Initiative, My Brother's Keeper, aimed at building a range of programs that provide a continuum of supports ranging from early learning to literacy to finding jobs for boys and men of color, from birth to adulthood. We know that this approach costs less than paying in the future for incarceration and can stop the cycle of violence in our cities."

Best practice research demonstrates that programs for high need populations work when they are multi-faceted, and ensure children are supported through health, education and social support programs that are well integrated. Furthermore, the programs must be

continuous and available to children during critical points in their lives, from birth to young adulthood, with particular priority given to those critical points in their lives such as early adolescence during the middle school years.

“All children deserve to feel safe and supported throughout their lives. We need to do for all children what we do for our own,” explains Josefina Alvarado Mena, CEO of Safe Passages, a twenty-year old organization working to improve the lives of youth. “We cannot expect a child to grow into a successful adult by providing access to health services only during infancy or by intervening for a summer during their young lives. The support needs to start with the families when their babies are born and throughout the child’s life into young adulthood.”

In East Oakland, the Baby Learning Programs funded by the City of Oakland Fund for Children and Youth reaches families with babies and young children, from birth to five. Families with infants participate in playgroups that teach the importance of attachment, and early brain development. Those with young children ages birth to five participate in parenting classes that focus on positive discipline strategies and the importance of early literacy activities

Marc, a dad who graduated from the program explains, “In the program, I learned how important it is to read to your baby, how to discipline him without yelling or hitting. I also learned about Early Head Start and health services I did not have before.”

Moving along the continuum, the Elev8 Oakland full service community schools initiative has proven to effectively improve academic achievement for African American boys. Through a \$15 million grant from Atlantic Philanthropies five years ago and additional investment from public systems of \$25 million, the Elev8 Initiative is now showing concrete and tangible results for the high need populations served, particularly for boys of color.

The Elev8 initiative strives to provide each child in high need middle schools with the supports needed to be successful in school and life. Since 2009, five schools in Oakland have developed into thriving centers of community through the development of on-site, school based health centers, family resource centers, innovative academic supports and a wealth of family supports.

Roosevelt Middle School, a school selected five years ago to participate in Elev8 due to its high need indicators, poverty and low academic performance has seen academic scores improve consistently for the last four years.

“Since the implementation of the Coordination of Service Team, a group of school based team of teachers and professionals, we are able to address each student’s individual needs,” explains Cliff Hong, Principal of Roosevelt Middle School. “If a student needs medical or dental health services, they are referred to the onsite school based health center; if a

student needs additional academic supports, we have a team of AmeriCorps members who provide mentoring and tutoring during the afterschool hours; we also have a family resource center that has brought all families to the forefront of their children's education."

Since 2009, the Academic Performance Index (API) score for Roosevelt Middle School has grown from 627, well below the state's target of 800, to 679 last year, a 52 point gain. The API scores of our African American Students increased almost 100 points in this same period. Since 2010, the academic growth of African American students at Roosevelt represents the greatest academic gains among African American students of all 14 stand-alone middle schools in the Oakland Unified School District.

Furthermore, an independent study found that 83% of students who received 60 hours of tutoring increased attendance in school by 50% or more. Also, 60% of students increased at least one functional grade level in English Language Arts. To date, approximately 500 African American and Latino boys have participated in the program delivered in 15 high need schools in the Oakland and San Lorenzo Unified School Districts.

For young men like Jason and Tomas, programs that provide mentoring and tutoring help turn around their trajectory. Tomas moved away from gangs and by the end of 8th grade had a 4.0 grade-point average. Now 18 and in college, his goal is to become a child psychologist.

"Stay in school. It's everything," Tomas tells the young people he works with. "In the end, it is really worth it. I was one of those kids that did not like school but I found people who cared about me. Never stop dreaming."

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