

# A Multisector Systems Change Approach to Domestic Violence Prevention

## BSCF PREAMBLE

In 2017, Blue Shield of California Foundation launched a new strategic plan that shifted away from largely supporting direct services to focus on more upstream solutions to advance health equity and prevent domestic violence. As part of this change, the Foundation launched two new initiatives in 2018: Leveraging Collaboration to End Domestic Violence (LCDV) and Safety Through Connection (STC). LCDV was created by the Foundation to form multisector collaboratives with domestic violence-centered organizations at the core of the collaborative. The goal was to increase the capacity of domestic violence organizations to bring in other sectors to their work within a collaborative structure. The STC learning community was initiated by the Prevention Institute to create a cohort of established collaboratives that had not yet applied a domestic violence prevention framework to their work to incorporate that framework and explicitly work towards ending domestic violence. Each cohort received long-term funding, technical assistance, and a range of other supports.

The collaboratives highlighted in this brief and the profiles upon which it is based are ones from both LCDV and STC that have been in the cohorts from their start in 2018 through 2023. The Foundation's evaluation partner, Strategic Prevention Solutions, created the profiles to describe the composition, community engagement activities, and accomplishments of the six collaboratives and reflect the diversity of structures, approaches, and partnerships related to domestic violence prevention. These collaboratives include:

- CHAN BOF for Peace Collaborative (LCDV)
- The Contra Costa Alliance to End Abuse (LCDV)
- Healthy Black Families Collaborative (LCDV)
- The Center at McKinleyville (STC)
- Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas (STC)
- East African Youth Collaborative (STC)



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This brief synthesizes the findings across the six collaboratives described in the profiles, highlighting some of the differences between LCDV and STC collaboratives. Part 1 describes the important processes they engaged in the development of the collaborative (LCDV) or in building its capacity (STC). Part 2 provides examples of the ways collaboratives engaged their communities as part of their efforts to build power and prevent domestic violence. The brief concludes in Part 3 with a discussion of the ways the collaboratives used a systems change framework to shift policies and resource flows.

# 1

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLABORATIVES & BUILDING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

During the first cycle of funding, the newly formed LCDV collaboratives focused on foundational development such as expanding their partner network and formalizing communication processes and leadership structures. In contrast, the established STC collaboratives built upon their strong structural base to continue to expand their capacity to support their communities. They also focused on learning and sharing with their partners how their work can impact risk and protective factors for preventing domestic violence.

### Building the foundation:

#### Formalizing structures & creating an onboarding process

In the formation stage of development, collaboratives in the LCDV cohort adopted processes to facilitate collaboration and align their strategies around prevention. Helpful processes included creating guiding goals and foundational documents focused on prevention and establishing robust onboarding and engagement processes for new members. For example, **Contra Costa Alliance to End Abuse's** [A Call to Action](#) report has served as a guiding document to focus strategies and guide conversations with new partners about their role in domestic violence prevention. In addition, it directs and outlines the goals and strategies of the Family Violence Prevention Task Force to address root causes of interpersonal violence, and calls for more responsive, inclusive, and equitable strategies of prevention work.

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**CHAN-BOF** formalized its structure and established an onboarding process for new members that creates a common understanding of the collaborative's goals and values as well as their role and expectations for participation. They developed mission, vision, and values statements, and implemented a steering committee decision-making process. The collaborative also developed a domestic violence and prevention glossary for Hmong-to-English and English-to-Hmong terminology. This shared language has allowed all members of the collaborative to be on the same page when speaking about domestic violence issues.

### Defining and expanding the base:

#### Growing and diversifying collaborative membership

The LCDV cohort was composed of newly established collaboratives and needed to focus deliberately on increasing the number and type of partners in the collaborative and engaging new sectors to aid them in reaching their prevention goals. **CHAN-BOF**, for instance, established and reached the goal of fostering new relationships and deepening trust with individuals and organizations in Sacramento, Merced, and Fresno Counties. The collaborative started with only a handful of organizers and advocates already in the movement to end gender-based violence. But within one year, collaborative members met, recruited, and trained community members with diverse backgrounds—some who had never been involved in the movement to end gender-based violence—to join in the work. They engaged partners working in sectors including K–12 or higher education, mental health, and healthcare. This organizing tactic increased the size of the collaborative and widened the collective knowledge of the group.

### Applying data for strategy:

#### Gathering information on community needs

Collaboratives from both the LCDV cohort and STC learning community collected information on the needs of their communities to help them prioritize their strategies. They used the resulting data to better understand the challenges that communities faced, their relationship to domestic violence, and to help formulate strategies the collaboratives might take

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to prevent domestic violence. The [Center at McKinleyville](#), (an STC collaborative) conducted a community asset and needs assessment in 2019 to support its goal of creating conditions of safe and nurturing families. Assessment activities included a community input meeting, a focus group with youth, a panel discussion with local service providers, presentations from local tribal members, and a review of local data related to risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence. During the assessment process community members identified several areas of interest including parenting, communication, social support building, mentorship, and life skills which resulted in programming and advocacy activities from the collaborative.

The [Healthy Black Families Collaborative](#) of the LCDV cohort convened members of the Black community in the Sacramento region to explore why that community did not see WEAVE, the local domestic violence service provider, as a resource for them and how it might make its services more culturally responsive. A series of community listening sessions uncovered how local systems have harmed the Black and African American community, which resulted in distrust. WEAVE and its partners in the collaborative used these findings to identify strategies to address these shortcomings and build relationships with trusted agencies in the African American/Black community.

### Leading with culturally responsiveness and community representation

Several collaboratives were selected to participate in the cohorts due in large part to their ability to represent and respond to the needs of their communities. These were collaboratives which were led by organizations that were already serving and/or were staffed by individuals from those communities. Thus, they were an established and trusted community support. This allowed them to understand the challenges, assets, and nuances of working in the community and draw on the strengths they offer. However, there were other collaboratives which were not led by organizations representing the community they served. They instead sought out collaborative partner organizations which did reflect the communities and could authentically inform strategies that were culturally responsive.

United Women of East Africa Support Team (UWEAST) staff and volunteers, who form the backbone of the [East African Youth Collaborative](#) (STC), come

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from East African refugee and Muslim communities themselves and are a trusted part of the fabric of the community. Most refugees in their networks share experiences of familial loss, violence, and trauma in their countries of origin and during migration, as well as secondary trauma from resettlement challenges such as intergenerational conflict, community safety, and social isolation. The East African refugee community is also subject to bias and discrimination against refugees, people of color, and Muslims and structural inequities in areas of health, housing, employment, and justice. Building on their shared identities and common experiences as both staff and community members, they cultivate lifelong strong relationships with each other, creating a leadership development pipeline and even pathways to hiring community members as staff and program alumni network.

In response to the earlier referenced finding by the [Healthy Black Families Collaborative](#) (LCDV) that the Black/African American community did not see WEAVE as a trusted partner, the lead agency sought to improve its relationship with the Black community and build organizational wide capacity to be responsive to and serve an increasingly diverse community from an inside-out approach. Internally, they held a series of three in-person trainings for all WEAVE staff that addressed the topics of cultural responsiveness and racial equity. The goals were to improve client services and outcomes and align more closely with the Cultural & Linguistically Appropriate Standards (CLAS). Additionally, WEAVE hired a senior staff person reflective of the Black community to support a new racial justice focus as Chief Equity & Transformational Change Officer. Collaborative programming also reflected a shifting of power to the community. Externally, the Community Ambassadors program provided people with lived experiences of domestic violence with training DV 101, WEAVE resources, peer support, facilitation, Mental Health First Aid Training, and support to serve as trusted messengers and resources in the community. They serve as facilitators of groups where survivors can talk about their experience, strengths, and hopes on their journeys of recovery.

## 2

### DEVELOPING ROBUST PRACTICES ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & POWER BUILDING

Collaboratives directly engaged with communities through education, training, and programming. These activities benefited community members and organizations through promoting power building of individuals and developing strategies. Those activities built the social capital and credibility with stakeholders to improve community safety and well-being, including conditions that prevent domestic violence.

#### Training as a collaborative strategy

Most collaboratives conducted trainings for their partners and/or the community to create an understanding and shared vision for domestic violence prevention. They often focused on analyzing the root causes of domestic violence in their community. Training took the form of informal conversations during collaborative meetings as well as formal presentations. For example, [The Contra Costa Alliance to End Abuse](#) (LCDV) and one of its programs, the Family Justice Center, focused on helping other county agencies and community partners understand how racial equity, poverty, and community safety play a role in preventing interpersonal violence. The coalition members discussed these issues during regular meetings with partners as well as conducted trainings in the community. In November 2022, the Alliance's Family Violence Task Force held a one-day conference entitled *Mission Possible: Prevent Violence in Our Community*. *Mission Possible* focused on understanding violence prevention from a public health lens. Speakers included community experts in anti-violence, racial equity, and interpersonal violence work. This conference was catalytic in creating lasting relationships between community groups and county agencies on violence prevention and the 2023 conference expanded the conversation to explore where preventing gun violence was part of the Alliance's work.

#### Power building for connection and action

Some collaboratives worked to shift power dynamics and foster relationships within their community. For example, the overarching

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strategy of **Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas** (STC) was to harness the potential power of the large number of Latina immigrants throughout Fresno County and establish networks to build individual and community resilience and mitigate the risk of domestic violence. MPA established a private WhatsApp group that has grown steadily over time. This online community offered emotional wellness, resource sharing, capacity building, community organizing, and opportunities to build influence and power. Members discussed community needs and planned actions to address them (see Policy and Funding Shifts section below). During the pandemic shelter-in-place, this group shared resources on education, school services, anti-eviction and housing, food distribution, and COVID testing. They also organized a food and personal hygiene drive for senior members of their community.

### Programming to support community

Collaboratives implemented programming to improve community members' health and safety, economic mobility, and community connection.

The anticipated assets from these programs are leading to increased protective factors and reduced risk factors for domestic violence, including greater access to services, increased community connection, improved communication skills, and challenging traditional gender norms.

For example, UWEAST, the backbone agency of the **East African Youth Collaborative**, (STC) created positive programming and a holistic support approach for youth through collaborative community-led programming. Programs develop community ownership and leadership, strengthen positive connection to cultural, racial, and religious identities in the face of structural bias and inequities, and build a safe, trauma- and healing-informed, and joyful container for reducing and addressing multiple stressors that young people face at a developmentally sensitive period. Continuous input from the community guided efforts and ensured cultural sensitivity and fit. Mentorship equipped young people with skills and resources to build healthy relationships and manage conflicts and obstacles within relationships.

# 3

## SHIFTING POLICY & RESOURCES

The Foundation encouraged collaboratives to consider their prevention strategies through a systems change lens, and specifically FSG's [The Water of Systems Change](#). The structural change level of this framework addresses policies and practices as well as the resource flows and conditions that can hold societal problems in place. Policies refer to the rules, regulations, and priorities that guide government, institutions, and organizations. Resource flows affect how money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets are allocated and distributed. These conditions can be particularly difficult to shift and require a strong network to address. In this section we will highlight how some collaboratives worked to shift policies, practices, and resource flows to prevent domestic violence.

### Transforming policies & practices

Some collaboratives focused on ways that their community-based organizations or county agencies could change their policies around practices to better serve their community and prevent domestic violence. The opening of the [Center at McKinleyville](#) (STC) and commitment of Humboldt County DHHS to co-locate staff at this one-stop location increased access to services for rural and tribal communities and thus represents a major shift in county level policy and practice. The planning process leading up to The Center's opening as well as the current Community Advisory Committee reinforced the importance of the voice of the community to ensure that The Center continues to meet the needs of community members and local and tribal organizations. WEAVE, the backbone organization for the [Healthy Black Families Collaborative](#) (LCDV), also changed organizational practices to further their collaborative's goal to support the African American/Black community. They placed a WEAVE domestic violence Advocate with trusted agencies in the community, which was a departure from the usual practice of requiring community members to come to WEAVE to initiate services. This increased accessibility of services and trust in WEAVE as a domestic violence service provider and resulted in increased use of services by the Black/African American community.



### Shifting resource flows

Other collaboratives used the power of their networks to influence how local and county agencies could shift funding and other resources to better meet the needs of their community. **Mujeras Poderosas Amorosas** (STC) was particularly effective at transforming community engagement and power building successes into action. Their members attended advocacy events as well as met with decision makers to increase access to resources that would keep their communities housed, healthy, and safe.

- **Housing:** MPA participated with community partners in the City of Fresno Housing for All rally. Additionally, MPA participants attended a housing event (Las Llaves de tu Casa) to discuss pathways to home ownership for Latina immigrants. MPA also met with the City of Fresno and Fresno County to discuss resources to help keep families housed and create opportunities for increased home ownership.
- **Healthy school meals:** During the pandemic, MPA advocated for school districts to adopt waivers so they could continue to feed children while schools were closed. One advocacy success was ensuring the availability of school meals to younger siblings who were not yet of school age.
- **Community safety:** MPA met with local parks and infrastructure leaders to support community safety. MPA has successfully advocated for the unlocking of school gates in park-poor neighborhoods. As a result, more children have safer places to play.

The San Diego Wellness Collaborative and the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition, of which UWEAST (the backbone agency of the **East African Youth Collaboratives** (STC)) is a founding and active member, received a BUILD Health Challenge grant to improve housing stability for refugee populations in El Cajon using a multi-sector, community-driven approach. This bold effort includes upstream advocacy to influence policy and system changes among housing stakeholders, cross-sector community education about housing regulations and the unique challenges faced by refugee populations, and capacity building to better enable refugee populations to understand, navigate, and access housing assistance and processes.

## CONCLUSION

This brief and the accompanying collaborative profiles have outlined the ways that community-based multi-sector collaboratives funded by BSCF developed their collaborative (LCDV) and built their capacity (STC) to prevent domestic violence. It also discussed the strategies and successes inherent to engaging communities and the systems change work of shifting policies and resource flows to impact the risk and protective factors associated with domestic violence.

The brief also highlighted some of the differences between the approach of the LCDV and STC collaboratives. The LCDV cohort was more likely to address domestic violence prevention or access to services directly. STC collaboratives sought to ameliorate the risk and protective factors for domestic violence, even when domestic violence prevention was not stated explicitly as a goal of the collaborative. Both cohorts centered the role of equity and racism in community safety and well-being and uplifted the voices of community in seeking solutions through changes in policy, practices, and resource flows.

## THE COLLABORATIVES

### Leveraging collaboration to end domestic violence

[CHAN-BOF for Peace Collaborative](#) (CHAN-BOF) is a program of the [Alliance for Community Transformations](#). Services are located in Sacramento, Merced, and Fresno, counties with large Hmong populations. Collaborative partners work with community members, advocates, and community leaders.

[The Contra Costa Alliance to End Abuse](#), (Alliance) is a unit within the Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department. The community of focus are government agencies and community-based organizations that can design and implement prevention strategies to reduce interpersonal violence in Contra Costa County.

[Healthy Black Families Collaborative](#) (HBFC) With [WEAVE](#) as its lead agency, the collaborative supports the African American/Black community of South Sacramento.

### Safety through connection

[The Center at McKinleyville](#) (The Center) serves the unincorporated community located on the northern coast of Humboldt County. The lead agency is the [McKinleyville Family Resource Center](#).

[Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas](#) (MPA) engages a network of Fresno County immigrant Latina women. The lead agency is [Cultiva La Salud](#).

[East African Youth Collaborative](#) (EAYC) serves the refugee community and specifically individuals and families from East Africa living in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego. The lead agency is [UWEAST](#) (United Women of East Africa Support team).