

Senate Health & Welfare testimony

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Building Flourishing Communities

In early December of 2016, 300 people from across Vermont gathered at the Lake Morey Resort to learn about the [Self-Healing Communities Model](#). SHCM engages parents as agents of change. It builds the capacity of communities to define and solve problems most relevant to them. It helps parents and community members to generate new cultural norms that mirror the values and aspirations that community members have for their children. It requires investment in the processes of healthy community and family life: engagement, learning, innovation and reflection. Uncommon partners across disciplines, systems and cultures share resources and high expectations. They develop a commitment to a new sense of shared identity—one of hope, optimism, efficacy, curiosity and welcoming.

social workers, mental health counselors, teachers, school nurses, doctors, nurses, law enforcement, early childhood experts of all disciplines, and lawmakers are just some of the professions that were represented at the BFC summit.

While knowledge about the life-long impacts of early childhood adversity has become widespread in Vermont, evidence-informed, public health methods of preventing such adversity have been lacking.

- Work to prevent ACEs, intervene and provide treatment has a long history in Vermont,
- direct services remain critically important to respond to the needs created by adversity - there are many effective, successful programs to intervene, educate parents (which can prevent the “handing-down” of trauma in the family), and provide treatment.
- Such services don’t stem the flow of people into those services across Vermont’s entire population.
- To prevent early childhood adversity across the entire population, we need a public health approach to changing the causal factors that support high levels of trauma and lead to people needing assistance.

- The Self-Healing Communities Model, with more than 15 years of impressive outcomes and return-on-investment data, provides such a preventive, health-promotion approach.

GRAPHS

Since the summit, a small “think tank” has been convened to plan for implementation. The Building Flourishing Communities Think Tank (BFC Think Tank) includes representatives from Building Bright Future, the Vermont Food Bank, an Accountable Community for Health, philanthropic foundations, a community mental health agency, a community justice center and Agency of Human Services staff from Integrating Family Services and the Departments of Mental Health and Children & Families. Some suggested first tasks:

1. Maintain enthusiasm statewide while building a public/private partnership that can implement the model
 - a. Demonstrate how BFC ties into work underway
2. Create a Steering Committee
3. Identify a “backbone” agency that can administer funds
4. Develop a fund-raising plan