Place Matters: How the Environment We Create Shapes the Foundations of Early Childhood Development

A wide range of conditions in the places where children live, grow, play, and learn can get "under the skin" and affect the developing brain and other biological systems. Beginning before birth, these environmental conditions shape how children develop, which shapes their lifelong physical and mental health.

The built and natural environments that surround children and families are shaped by and deeply rooted in historic and public policies, such as redlining, that influence where people are able to live and what resources they can access. As a result, levels of exposure to hazards and access to opportunity are not distributed equally. In short, place matters.

IN THIS SOLUTIONS SPOTLIGHT ISSUE IN FOCUS The Importance of Safe, Accessible **Green Space** SPOTLIGHT ON SOLUTIONS Inspired Policies & Programs that are Improving Young Children's **Environments** ADDITIONAL RESOURCES Further reading on related issues and solutions

All communities have aspects of their built and natural environments that have been designed through decisions made over time—including decisions being made today—and they can be re-designed to support healthy development. Working together across policy domains within and beyond the early childhood sector—including areas like urban planning, environmental protection, and anti-discrimination policies—we can re-shape environmental influences with a science-informed lens so that all children can grow up in homes and neighborhoods free of hazards and full of opportunity.



ISSUE IN FOCUS

and reducing extreme heat events, particularly in dense urban areas.

physical activity levels within a community, while also improving air quality

Understand the ways that political and

As a result of historic and present-day policy decisions, neighborhoods populated predominately by people

Considerations for Adding & Improving Green Space

of color are far more likely to have high levels of air pollution, excessive noise, and higher temperatures. By

social history have shaped your community.

finding creative ways to add green space in these neighborhoods—and by prioritizing input and participation from community members—policymakers can help reduce these adversities and better support the healthy development of children and the wellbeing of their caregivers. Consider complimentary policies and community needs to support equitable use of green space.

Science tells us that a web of interconnected environmental conditions impact child development.

When creating policies and programs aimed at adding green space, policy makers should consider

complimentary policies to ensure all children can fully benefit. Such considerations include:

Adding green space often increases property values in a Green space often reduces community violence, but for neighborhood, driving out many families and leaving those this to occur, leaders need to promote healthy use of the space. For example, when leaders respond to community children excluded from the benefits. Anti-gentrification policies, including those that safeguard and expand affordable housing, feedback on what to include in the space, the likelihood of can mitigate "green gentrification."

healthy engagement increases.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

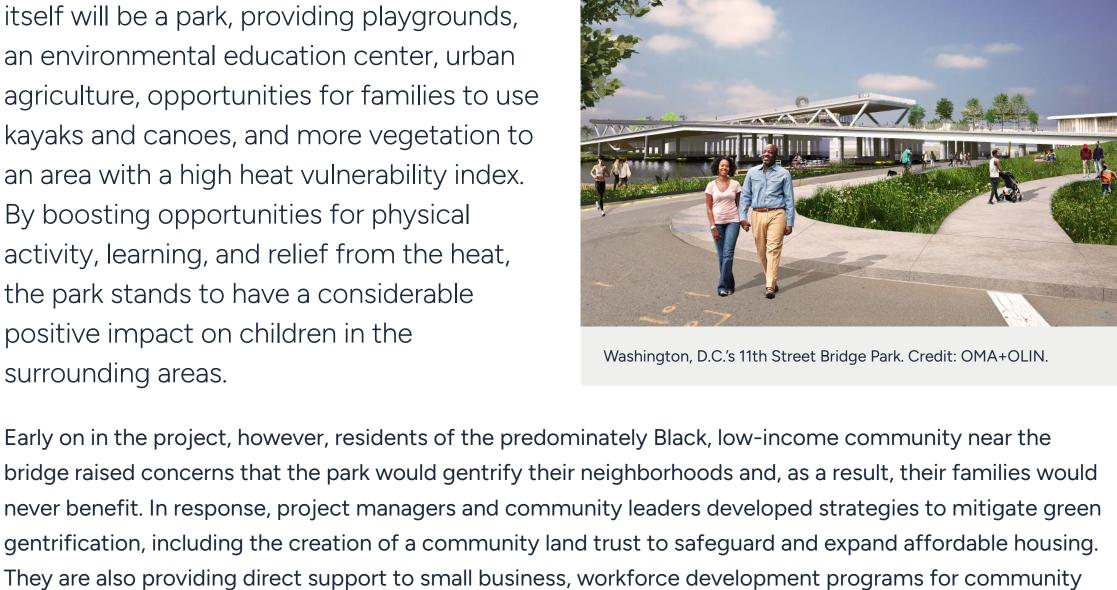
→ Policy in Action:

URBAN HOUSING POLICIES

will cross the Anacostia River. The bridge itself will be a park, providing playgrounds, an environmental education center, urban agriculture, opportunities for families to use kayaks and canoes, and more vegetation to an area with a high heat vulnerability index. By boosting opportunities for physical activity, learning, and relief from the heat, the park stands to have a considerable positive impact on children in the surrounding areas. Early on in the project, however, residents of the predominately Black, low-income community near the

Washington D.C. is building an elevated,

recreational 11th Street Bridge Park that



of the river non-profit Building Bridges Across the River and the District Department of Transportation. You can read more about their work <u>here</u>. SPOTLIGHT ON SOLUTIONS Inspired Policies & Programs that are Improving Young Children's Environments

members, and installations by local artists. The 11th Street Bridge Park is a partnership between the east

sources of pollution.

Reducing Air Pollution → Policy in Action: The city of Madison, Wisconsin won a federal Air pollution impacts young children's developing lungs grant from the EPA to install air pollution monitors and immune system, which can sometimes be a trigger across the city and spread awareness about for asthma and certain neurodevelopmental outcomes, the link between air quality and health. With the including autism. The best way to reduce pollution is to

Increasing Access to Nutritious Food When young children experience over- or under-nutrition,

including during prenatal development, it elevates their risk

of obesity, hypertension, and heart disease in adulthood.

However, in many communities, access to affordable,

nutritious food is limited. Policymakers can support

cut emissions, but other solutions that will benefit children

include: installing air filtration systems in highly polluted

areas and building schools and housing developments

farther away from highways and other significant

partnering with many community organizations, including The Foundation for Black Women's Wellness, The Latino Health Council of Dane County, and The Hmong Institute. Learn more. → Policy in Action: As part of a broader CDC-funded community health initiative, the Boston Public Health Commission, the Boston Housing Authority, and others partnered with a local health center to increase access to nutritious food for

public housing residents. Working with Fresh

in response to community concerns around the

challenges of shopping for healthy food in their

with vouchers to shop at Fresh Truck, initially

span. Today, Fresh Truck continues to bring

serving nearly 3,000 customers in a nine-month

neighborhood—health centers provided residents

Truck—a non-profit mobile market created

monitors, the city will be able to understand who

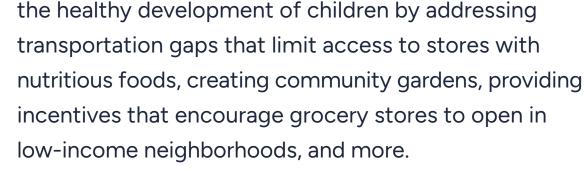
is being impacted most severely by air pollution

and then directly address this health inequity

with targeted air pollution mitigation efforts.

into solutions and decision-making, the city is

To ensure that affected communities have input



low-income neighborhoods, and more.

Reducing Lead Exposure Exposure to lead during early periods of development can lead to negative health outcomes for children, including learning and behavioral difficulties. Taking

action to remove lead from water delivery systems and

support the replacement of lead paint in older housing

developments can help prevent such outcomes.

nutritious food to public housing residents and health centers across Boston each week, reducing food insecurity and helping health center providers connect their patients to a healthy, affordable food resource. Learn more. → Policy in Action: In Vermont, the state mandated that all schools and childcare centers test for lead in their drinking water. Results showed that one out of five drinking water taps had elevated lead levels. To ensure transparency and support community engagement, schools were required to inform parents, caregivers, and staff about the results, and the state provided resources for community members on lead safety. Now, the state is reimbursing schools to replace contaminated

infrastructure and increase the safety of drinking

water for thousands of children. Learn more.

Additional Resources

2022 Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap

Campaign Toolkit – Voices for Healthy Kids

Policy Equity Assessments – diversitydatakids.org Impact Stories – diversitydatakids.org

Health and Learning are Deeply Interconnected in the Body: An Action Guide for Policy Makers Center on the Developing Child

The Necessity of Urban Green Space for Children's Optimal Development - UNICEF

State of the Air: Recommendations for Action – American Lung Association

Office of Environmental Justice - United States Environmental Protection Agency

→ Read the full paper

Center on the Developing Child 📅 HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Development here.

include:

For the full paper on which this Solutions Spotlight is based, see Place Matters: The Environment We Create Shapes the Foundations of Healthy

Additional sources consulted in the creation of this Solutions Spotlight

10 Policies to Prevent and Respond to Childhood Lead Exposure - Pew Trust Boston REACH: Partners in Health and Housing – Boston Housing Authority

Can Anacostia Build a Bridge Without Displacing Its People? – New York Times Green gentrification in European and North American cities – Nature Communications

Greening Without Gentrification: Learning from Parks-Related Anti-Displacement Strategies Nationwide – The University of Utah, UCLA, and Green Info Network

Healthy Food Environments – Improving Access to Healthier Food - CDC The Impact of Green Space on Violent Crime in Urban Environments: An Evidence Synthesis – International

Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health The Nutrition Source: Healthy Food Environment– Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Policies to reduce pollution and protect health – Environmental Defense Fund

Vermont Lead in School and Child Care Drinking Water Progress Report - Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation & Department of Health