



# Youth Empowerment

# Our Mission and Vision

## **Vision**

Communities are restored and transformed through restorative practices.

## **Mission**

From a trauma-informed lens, engage high-needs youth and families; inspiring community leadership through resiliency-building, advocacy, and systemic transformation.



# Youth Empowerment History

**CITY HEIGHTS** *Life* LA VIDA May 2015 - FREE - Volume 4 - Issue 12

TRANSFORMING LIVES in City Heights

By David Ogul

**Transformando VIDAS en City Heights**

Por David Ogul

By David Ogul  
City Heights Life

Instead of dodging bullets on the street, they're dodging paintball pellets in a park. Instead of marking their turf with graffiti on public property, they're cleaning up taggers' work from swing sets and basketball courts.

Instead of focusing on all the wrongs in their community, they're focusing on how to make things right.

Welcome to Youth Empowerment, a burgeoning grassroots effort that began serendipitously just five months ago when Arturo Soriano and his wife, Gabby, strolled over to Teralta Park in City Heights looking for a team they had promised to help mentor. When they found the youth with a group of others, Arturo joined in for a few pickup games of basketball. Then they talked. For hours. About life. About their challenges.

About their dreams.

"We were just hanging out," Arturo Soriano said. "We brought over some pizza and talked. Then when we got ready to leave, the kids are like, 'Hey, when are we going to do this again?' So we said, 'Hey, how about next Sunday?'"

That was in December. They've been back every Sunday since. And word is spreading on the street. More than 100 youths, many of whom associate with gangs and almost all of whom fall into the category of being at-risk, have joined the open-minded movement that now includes park clean-ups, fundraising drives for families in need, and paintball battles in Escondido.

The effort has drawn notice from police officers and Juvenile Court judges, city officials and neighborhood activists.

And a whole lot of families.

"This is the epitome of grassroots, community organizing," said Dana Brown, a member of San Diego's Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention who works on a number of related projects in City Heights. "Arturo and Gabby are on the ground floor of a phenomenal movement that I really believe can become a national model of an exemplary, replicable program to serve youth who were on a pipeline to prison."

Robert Ortizveros grew up in City Heights and has been working with the Sorianos since the beginning.

"We're giving them an opportunity to do something different, to see something different, to help them set goals, to look at their future," he said.

The key is the leadership. Soriano and Ortizveros say they were anything but cheerboys in their youth. Soriano, 39, found more than his share of trouble while growing up in City Heights.

*En lugar de esquivar balas en la calle, ahora habitan de paintball en un parque. En lugar de marcar con graffiti la propiedad pública, están limpiando graffiti de los columpios y canchales de baloncesto.*

*En lugar de concentrarse en todo lo que está mal en su comunidad, se concentran en cómo mejorar las cosas.*

*Bienvenido a Youth Empowerment (Empoderamiento Juvenil), una primavera inciativa de base que comenzó por casualidad hace solo cinco meses cuando Arturo Soriano y su esposa Gabby caminaron por el Parque Teralta en City Heights buscando a un adolescente al que habían prometido ayudar. Cuando encontraron al joven en compañía de otros, Arturo se les unió para jugar baloncesto. Hablaron. Por horas. De la vida. De desafíos. De sueños.*

*"Estábamos pasando el tiempo", dijo Arturo Soriano.*

[ EMPOWER, P2 ] [ FORTALECIMIENTO, P2 ]



Parents who grew up in City Heights are making sure local youth stay away from violence, drugs, alcohol and gangs through a weekly gathering at Teralta Park. (Published Sunday, May 31, 2015)

[NBCsandiego - Teralta-Park-in-City-Heights-Gathering-Helps-Kee-p-Kids-Out-of-Trouble](#)

[Article on Transforming Lives in City Heights](#)

# Youth Empowerment Community Engagement



Resilience Blossoms

# Resilience





# Leadership



New Probation - Youth and Community Organization Collaborating

# Trauma Informed System



Trauma Informed Approach



# Learning Objectives

- Restorative Practices
- Traumatic Experiences for Marginalized Communities
- Community Mentors
- Community- Based Two Prong Approach
- Implication for Practice



# Restorative Practices



## Types of Trauma

A single traumatic event that is limited in time.

Acute Trauma

The experience of multiple traumatic events.

Chronic Trauma

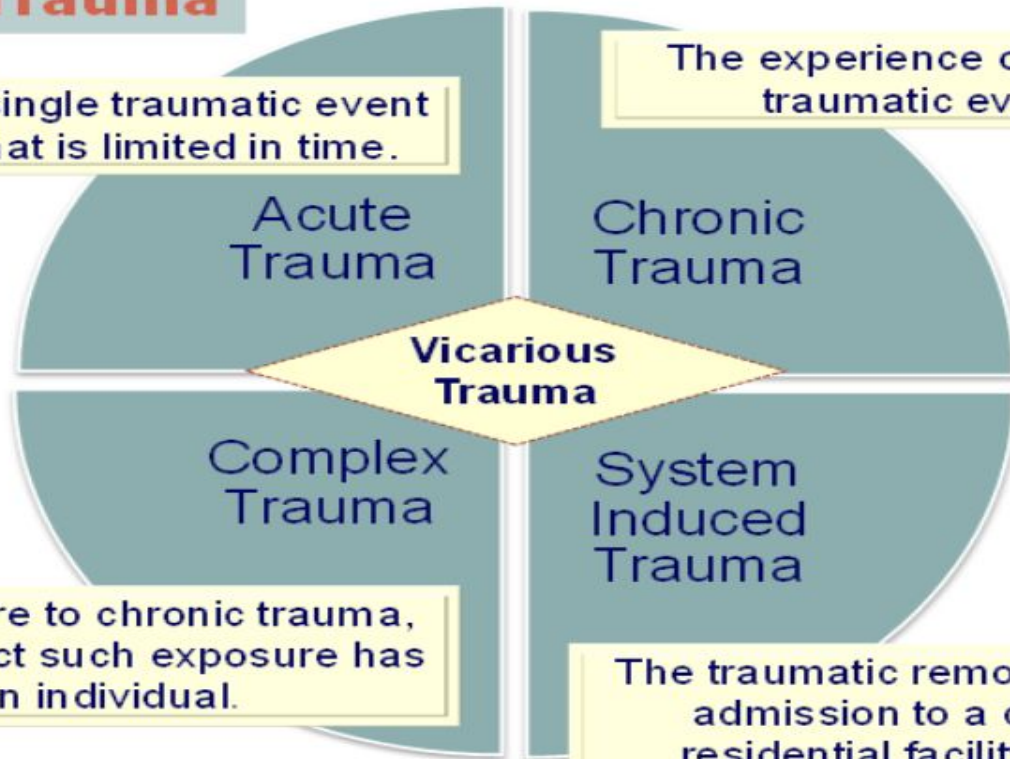
Vicarious Trauma

Complex Trauma

Both exposure to chronic trauma, and the impact such exposure has on an individual.

System Induced Trauma

The traumatic removal from home, admission to a detention or residential facility or multiple placements within a short time.



# Complex Trauma

A diagram illustrating the components of Complex Trauma. The central text 'Complex Trauma' is in large red font. Surrounding it are eight shapes, each containing a component name in red font. The shapes are arranged in a circle: 'Childhood Development Stressors' (white pentagon, top), 'Physical, Emotional, & Sexual Abuse' (yellow pentagon, top-right), 'Neglect & Abandonment' (white hexagon, right), 'Presence of Drugs' (yellow pentagon, bottom-right), 'Grief & Loss' (white pentagon, bottom), 'Psychological Stress' (yellow pentagon, bottom-left), 'Community, Family, & School Violence' (white hexagon, left), and 'Poverty' (yellow pentagon, top-left). The background is dark gray with a blue and green diagonal stripe on the left.

**Childhood  
Development  
Stressors**

**Physical,  
Emotional,  
& Sexual  
Abuse**

**Neglect &  
Abandonment**

**Presence of  
Drugs**

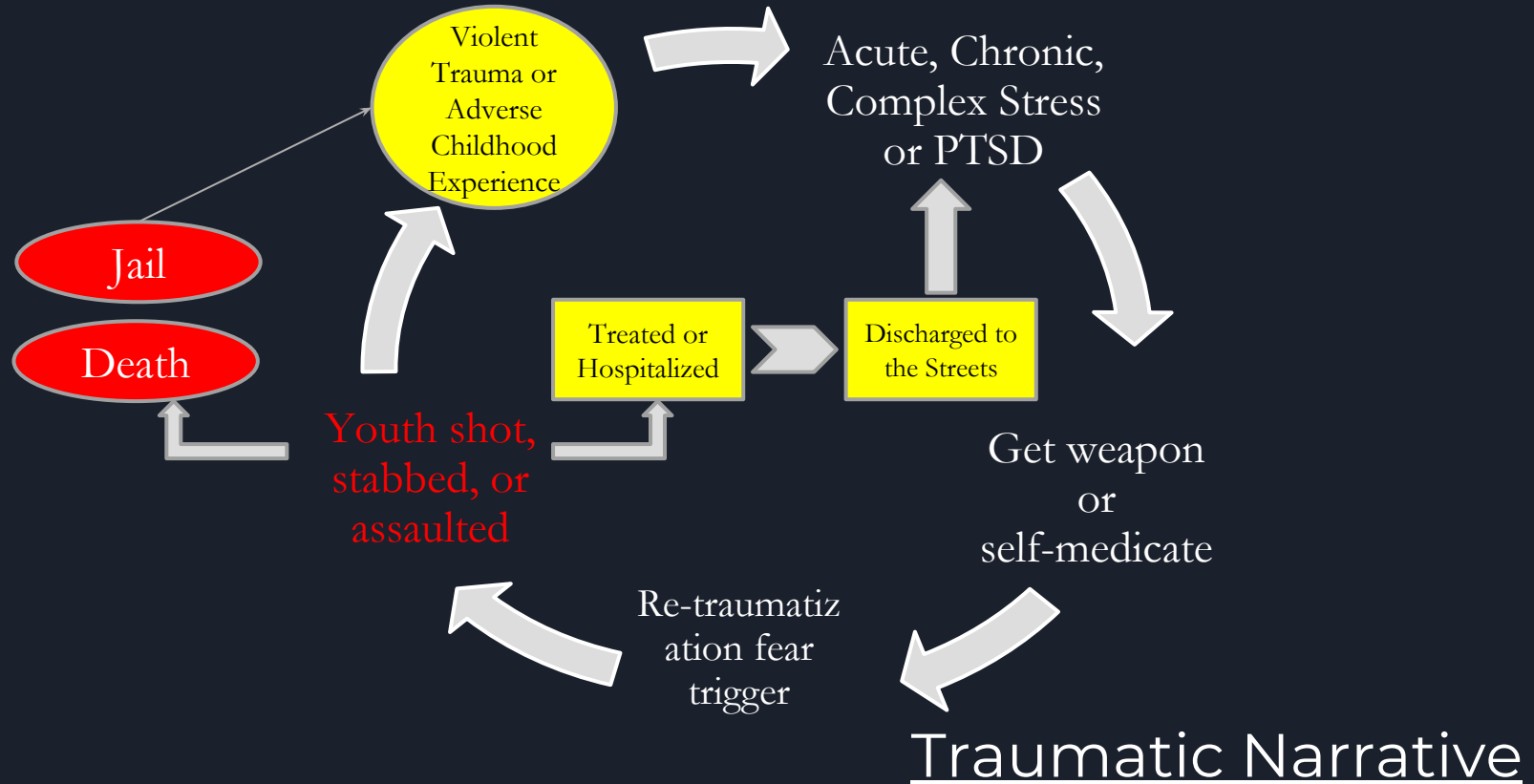
**Grief & Loss**

**Psychological  
Stress**

**Community,  
Family,  
& School  
Violence**

**Poverty**

# Traumatic Cycle of Violence



# Community Intervention Worker (CIW) “Community Mentors”

License To  
Operate

- Credibility
- Interface with violence
- Engage with the community at multiple levels

Referent  
Power

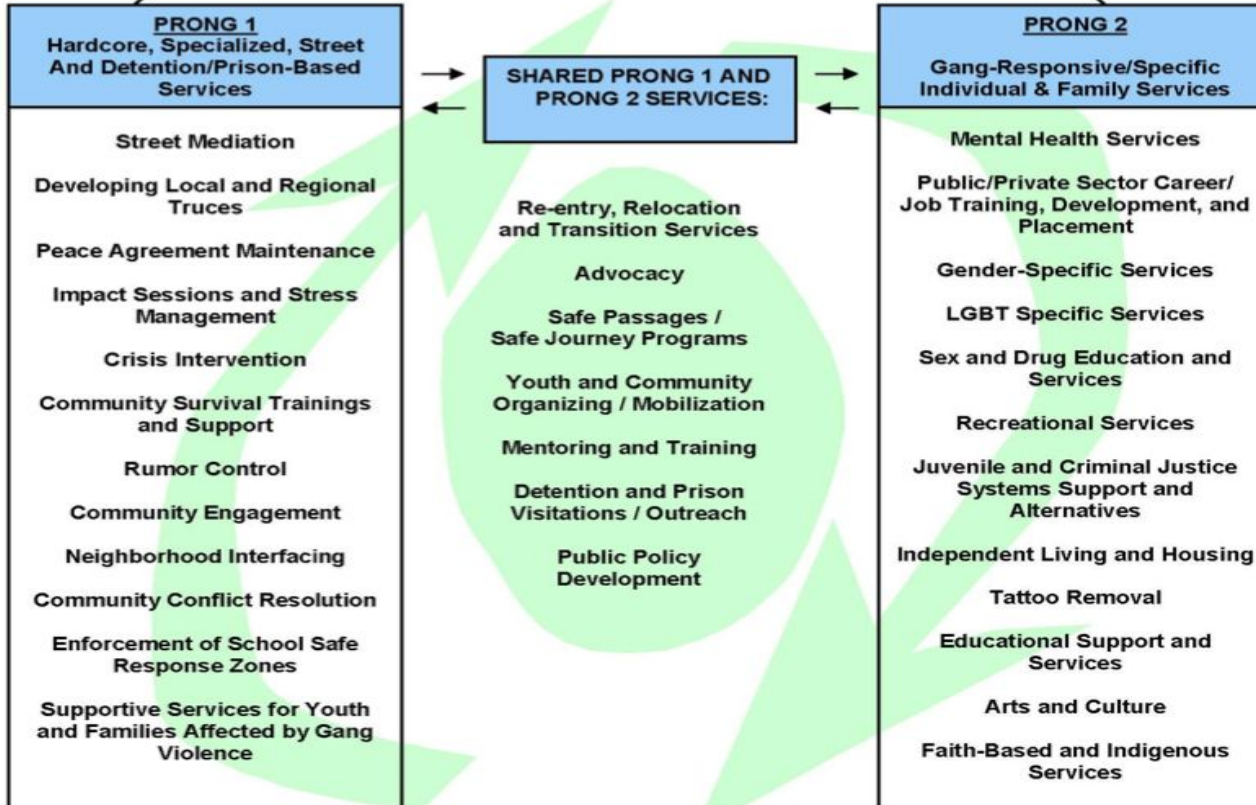
- Power of identity and lived experiences
- Cultural proficiency
- Gender specific/role models

RELATIONSHIPS  
(ACCESS)

- Trust & rapport (faster & stronger)
- Liaison for all levels of treatment
- Reduction in “us versus them” stigma



**Community-Based Gang Intervention's  
Two-Prong Approach  
(Integrated Community)**





# Implications for Practice

- ⦿ The most vital component is **developing strong rapport and creating a safe environment of compassion, kinship, and trust.**
- ⦿ Be genuine, respectful, and strength-based.
- ⦿ Start with an ecological perspective to get an understanding the historical, social, and ethnic identity dilemmas experienced by marginalized youth.
- ⦿ Be culturally proficient and address root causes and needs not being fulfilled by fragmented social institutions.
- ⦿ Focus on healing and learning about the person rather than controlling or modifying behaviors which will encounter resistance.
- ⦿ Engage youth to become actively involved in their community with the help of Community Mentors.

# Partnerships

- Latino Coalition
- San Diego Probation Dept.
- The California Endowment
- Pacific Western Bank
- Live Well San Diego
- Center for Employment Opportunities
- Project A.W.A.R.E
- Paying Great Futures
- Youth Voice
- San Diego Police Dept.
- Alliant University





# Contact Information

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