

# NEIGHBORHOOD BENCHES, INC.

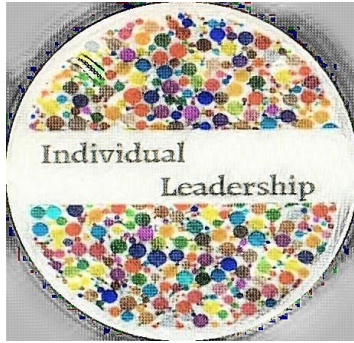
*Theory of Change*

*Model Change & Build Community*



**Neighborhood Benches**

Est. 2016



## Individual Leadership

Neighborhood Benches enhances the lives of individuals from all sections of the community by building upon their leadership, as individuals and as communities, to work towards a more just, fair and diverse society addressing the contributing factors impeding both, public safety and public health suppressed in social problems.



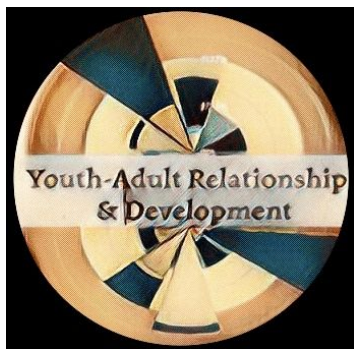
## COMMUNITY Leadership

Neighborhood Benches builds a leadership community of students, teachers, professionals, CBO's, and community leaders committed to learning from and addressing public policies and practices impeding the health and safety of community members challenging social problems.



## NEIGHBORHOOD Leadership

Neighborhood Benches builds upon the leadership of public figures, role models, resident leaders, neighborhood leaders, and the next-generation of leaders working towards solutions to rebuild self-worth and self-value of those contributing to public health and public safety crisis in the community on both micro and macro levels increasing the social problems destroying community.



## Youth-Adult Relationship & Development

Neighborhood Benches builds upon the leadership of the youth-adult relationship and development approaches to advance and educate the community-engaged cultural shift needed to work towards public health and public safety interventions and solutions to better address the social problems impacting the next-generation of leaders and their communities.



## **Inclusive Leadership** (Life Cycle)

Neighborhood Benches builds upon the leadership of all members as thought partners working on social problems and the contributing factors impeding the health and safety of community members by increasing their community presence and educational engagements.



## **Movement Leadership**

Neighborhood Benches catalyzes its growing network of thought partners and next-generation of leaders mobilized to increase the presence of diverse leadership among the movement to increase public health and safety as change makers for addressing other social problems.



## **Model Change & Build Community**

Neighborhood Benches increases the presence of diverse leadership fulfilled with people seeking ways to empower themselves and others to pursue a self-determined course of life that includes community engagement and independent



## INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood Benches is a team of **thought partners** that **model change**, share diverse experiences and educational insight to strengthen young people decision making skills and **build community** that is supportive of the **next-generation of leaders** stepping into leadership roles with our thought partners.

Neighborhood Benches is a neighborhood by neighborhood approach to activate leadership of underrepresented youth and adults while connecting them to groups of leaders addressing social justice issues and social problems impacting neighbors and communities.

## THE NEED

Like never before, violence and incarceration among the youth is at an all time high and youths have no idea for how this public health and public safety issue impacts them, their family and community. Youths are in need of positive role models and communities better prepared to address public health and safety issues impacting their decisions for violence and choices contributing to incarceration. Thus, the leadership is highly important and recommended, leadership must be leaders who are recognized from their neighborhood with the ability to activate all of a community's assets, connect people across communities, and facilitate collaborative action.

## HYPOTHESIS

More young people will divert from behaviors of violence leading to incarceration if they learn from the experts talking about the need for change. More young people will speak out on these social problems and participate in various social change dialogues and movements if the process is inclusive, understandable, accessible and facilitated by their peers and neighborhood leaders knowledgeable of the needs, practices and solutions driving the change.

Although Neighborhood Benches mission is to increase awareness of public health and public safety issues impacting communities, they're also building upon the natural strengths and leadership of underrepresented thought partners providing solutions and practices towards social problems and the diverse leadership to sustain it. Its dedication to the multigenerational approaches where youth-adult relationship, development and leadership are key elements of its mission, the development of next-generation of leaders and thought partners are instrumental to its success.

## NEIGHBORHOOD BENCHES MATERIALS

1. CHOICE Building Tools (CCC)
2. Model Change (Training & Program Manual)

### 3. Dialogue Guide (Generating the Narrative: Culture & Hood)

## PROCEDURE

1. Leaders Leadership League (13-month place-based cohort initiative)
2. Documentary & Music Group Program (Therapeutic Processes)
3. Project to College Pipeline Initiative
4. Operation Neighborhood Benches Project Initiative
5. Build Community (The Experiential Learning Model)
6. The Gift and the Curse (Storytelling, Public Speaking & Lectures)

## REPORTS

Social Problems	Impact	Probable Solutions
Public Safety	Violence, Injustices, Oppression	Individual & Movement Leadership: Leaders Leadership League (LLL) and Neighborhood Relations Services (NRS)
Public Health	Violence, Injustices, Oppression	Inclusive Leadership: Community-Engaged Research and Patient-Centered Research.
Poor Education (Lack of Diversified Skills and Experiences)	Violence, Injustices, Oppression	Community & Neighborhood Leadership: Experiential Learning, The Gift and the Curse, and Mentors

## RESULTS

Neighborhood Benches conducted a Leaders Leadership League Initiative pilot in the South Bronx (16th poorest congressional district), a area in NYC. The Leaders Leadership League is a 13 month place-based cohort initiative for building leadership and raising awareness for public health and public safety. This particular leadership pilot was conducted in the Andrew Jackson and Morrisania Air Rights Houses from November, 2016 thru December, 2017 because of the 2013 reports of housing conditions and violence impacting the health and safety of the residents. Using the theory of change Neighborhood Benches created safe spaces for the community members (youth, adults

and elders) to share experiences and work together to model change and build community.

As a result of Neighborhood Benches 13 months of technical assistance to the community, community members are focusing more on social problems, and public safety and health awareness improved:

### **1. Leadership and Inclusion:**

Although the presence of community leaders (at the tenant association level) have been present and active, when it came to tenant rights, there have been a disconnect between the youth and community leaders. As a result of the disconnect, public safety continued to be an issue and there were no young or young adults involvement on public safety or public health dialogue.

As part of the 13 month Leaders Leadership League pilot, we also provided technical assistance and strategies to the two developments. As a result Neighborhood Benches strengthened the neighborhood leadership, and their participation in activities and mentoring presence increased by 100%. The strategies provided bridged the gap between youth, adults and community leaders. The bridging of the gap improved community input on projects, consultation with young adults, community engagement, summer youth participation and structured youth activities.

### **2. Education and Advocacy:**

Community members constantly complained about the condition of their community and how they were treated by police officers. In many cases the residents grew resistance towards the assistance of police officers and one another when it came to share their feelings and/or problems. This impacted the relationship of many community members and the students participating in the pilot program.

Neighborhood Benches implemented three strategies to improve the relationship between officers and the community, and increase the education level of the participants/students (which also included community youth) wanting to learn more.

Neighborhood Benches acting as a worksite:

- Took on 147 summer youth participants from SoBro, Children's Aid Society, Community Counseling & Mediation, and United Unlimited Activities to assist with community beautification.
- SYEP participants and young adults from the community engaged in dialogue focused on public safety and public health causes, impact and solutions. dialogue with young adults from the community impacted by both.
- Social Work, Theatre and Urban Leadership students from Lehman College studied the history of public housing, and the housing policies and practices. Much of their studies focused on both public health and safety. While housing was neglected in many ways, the health and safety of the development impacted the

residents. Students joined neighborhood benches experiential learning Build Community program to assist with these issues. Using the reported developed by city officials, students completed class assignments and community mapping projects to support the community. These NYCHA conditions were compared to various housing developments throughout the state.

- A. According to A Bronx New York City Housing Authority Task Force Public Safety Report dated November, 2017, there were 7 recommendations made to improve NYCHA based on collected data:
  - ❖ NYCHA is 4.8% of New York City's population.
  - ❖ NYCHA were the location of a full 20 percent of New York City's violent crimes during 2013.
  - ❖ From 2009 through the end of 2013, NYC saw a 3.3 percent increase in crime while NYCHA saw a 31 percent increase in crime.
  - ❖ Most recent data indicates that serious crimes in NYCHA developments rose about 2.4 percent from 5,088 in 2015 to 5,211 in 2016, in contrast to a citywide drop of approximately four percent.
  - ❖ The NYPD has reported to the task force that while The Bronx has, for 2017-to-date, seen a 28 percent decrease in murders, NYCHA housing only saw a four percent decrease

This 15 weeks of program assisted them with understanding the practices, procedures and policies residents of public housing dealt with daily. They also acknowledged the impact, along with the advantages and disadvantages.

Much of what they learned about public policies, procedures and practices used for public housing, were used for their class assignments and feedback to the youths within the community. Students were also challenged with putting into practice what they learned. This was also brought into our neighborhood benches discussion every 2nd visit.

We learned, as thought partners, students can learn a lot from attending conferences hosted by city and government officials. Students attended conferences in the Bronx and Manhattan. In the Bronx they met Mayor Bill DeBlasio, 16th District Council Member Vanessa Gibson, and Executive Director, Eric Cumberbatch (Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence). In Manhattan, East Harlem Taft Houses, the students met Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Councilman Ritchie Torres, State Sen. Brian Benjamin, New York Assemblyman Michael Blake, Assemblyman Robert Rodriguez and Public Advocate Letitia James. They joined the tenants and Tenant Association Presidents at the press conference to show the "Gallery of Shame" consisting of graphic images of hazardous and unsanitary conditions in NYCHA including the lead, mold and leaks.

At both conferences students asked questions and networked. Students reported, having the ability to attend conferences hosted by city and government officials provided them with the push needed to know they can too be heard and assist the same. The students

also met with both Tenant Association presidents from Andrew Jackson and Morrisania Air Rights Houses. The then Tenant Association President (2017) is now Citywide Chair (2018), also shared insights with the students and informed them of the roles for all Tenant Association members and the role of the TA Presidents. The visits to these conferences and meeting the residents allowed the students to learn more about the developments and the community youths learned about the students interest and studies.

### **3. Youth roles on Public Safety and Public Health**

Prior to this initiative neighborhood leaders minimized their community engagement and did not provide youths with the necessary support needed to make better decisions around health and safety. Since the launch of the pilot more adult leaders are taking the responsibility of teaching and mentoring. The youths and young-adults are accepting the adults and elders input. This relationship improved their decision making skills and more harder to reach youths and adults are taking the lead to start these relationships, with the support of Neighborhood Benches. Neighborhood Leaders are also taking these leadership roles more seriously and understand the important impact it'll have on individual and community levels.

Neighborhood Benches is aware, leadership identity of those residing in underrepresented neighborhoods and those that reached the limit at their organization are in need of a different pathway. In many cases, these pathways must lead and/or connect them to the place they call home if the leadership role plan to last. They understood leadership is both institutional and individual dimensions with a vision often exceeding a life span and/or the commitment to a cause may put one's life in jeopardy. This makes the neighborhood leadership role instrumental to of theory of change.

## **CONCLUSION**

As thought partners, we build upon natural strengths and leadership of individuals and communities, particularly those affected by social problems. As part of our Multi-generational base-building strategies to increase awareness and transform the lifestyle of individuals we work with, we provide opportunities for youths and young adults to showcase their leadership skills inside and outside of their community. Our interactive approaches incorporated into our programs, initiatives and projects are designed to train, prepare and facilitate the opportunities and the connection to community leaders and issues.

We promote youth-adult relationship, feedback, restorative practices, and utilize tools such as mapping (body and mind) for creating space, expanding thoughts and creating the comfort students need to in a learning environment. Through this process we create change and build room for more thought partners focused on model change to build community and leadership.

## **REFERENCES**



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3. [Helping At-Risk-Youth](#)
4. [Violence- a global public health problem](#)
5. [CDC- Levels of Strategies](#)
6. [The New York Amsterdam News](#)