# Five Foundational Protective Factors for Building Population-Level Mental Wellness and Resilience for the C-E-B Crisis

A handbook to guide strategy development for
Community-led Resilience Networks

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## Purpose of Handbook

This handbook describes the five foundational protective factors Community-led Resilience Networks (CRNs) should emphasize in their strategies to build population-level (universal) mental wellness and transformational resilience for the climate-ecosystem-biodiversity (C-E-B) crisis.

After they have established a formal steering committee with a mission, vision, and operating principles to guide their operations, members of "Start-Up" CRNs can use the information described here to learn what their strategies should emphasize.

Members of "Emerging" CRNs can use this Handbook to develop their strategies to build population-level mental wellness and transformational resilience.

Members of "Operational" CRNs can use the information provided in this Handbook to continually evaluate and improve their strategies and action plans.

The Handbook includes a number of links to resources that might be helpful to a CRN. It is not possible, however, to include links to every resource that might be useful in your neighborhood and community. We therefore urge you to get on the web, talk with local residents and professionals, and in other ways investigate resources that are likely to resonate with the populations and sectors your CRN intends to serve.

Much like the other handbooks provided to help guide CRNs, this one includes a good deal of information that is likely to be new to many people. We therefore encourage CRN members to read one section at a time slowly and with intention, discuss the content with others members, and make sure everyone understands the principles and practices that are discussed. When CRN members believe they have a sufficient understanding of the information, they can move to the next section and repeat the process. No matter how it is done, we urge everyone involved with a CRN to read this Handbook.

## I. How Traumatic Stresses and Acute Traumas Can Affect People

Every human is hard-wired to pay attention to things they perceive to be immediately threating. Our instinctive ability to notice bad things and protect ourselves from danger is why our species has become so dominant on earth. This ability, however, also makes it difficult to see distant threats as well as opportunities. We are more attuned to protecting ourselves than to seeing things that can make our lives significantly better. We explain this dynamic below.

Our "Resilience Growth Zone"

Most people have what the Trauma Resource Institute calls a "Resilience Zone" and we call a "Resilience Growth Zone." It refers to an area in which our body, mind, and emotions are in a state of wellness. People naturally move up and down within their Resilience Growth Zone during the day in response to changing situations. However, the ups and downs do not prevent them from feeling good, functioning well, and making decent decisions about how to respond to life's challenges.

However, when people experience a one-time or series of events perceived to be threating, they can be triggered and get pushed out of their Resilience Growth Zone into a high or low zone that prevents good decision making and leads to unhealthy and non-resilient reactions. This occurs because when we humans perceive a threat, our brain automatically releases the neurochemicals cortisol and adrenaline into the body to prepare us to fight back or flee the scene. If the rush of these "stress hormones" is overwhelming, we can freeze and hope the threat ignores us and goes away. Or, we can try to appease or please people in the hope the threat goes away, which is called the "fawn response."

These are built-in survival reactions that enable our survival and our resilience for adversities. You *should* feel stressed when facing threating situations because the "fear and alarm center" of your brain (the amygdala) has revved up the sympathetic nervous system in your body—and sidelined your thinking mind—to concentrate all your energy on defending yourself.

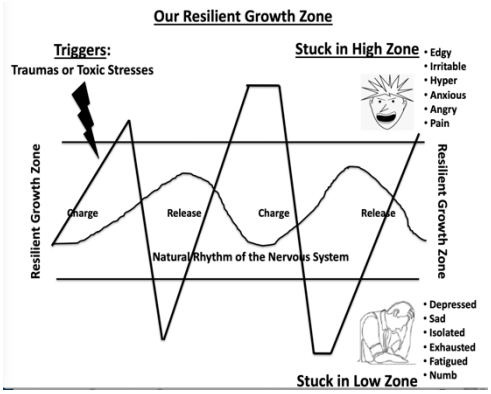
Most people can release the fight-flight-freeze or fawn reactions generated by this natural survival response after the threat ends, they find ways to deal with it, or they determine it was a false alarm. When this occurs, they return to their Resilience Growth Zone where they can feel good and function well *and* use adversities as transformational catalysts to learn, grow, and find positive new sources of meaning, purpose, and hope in life. [1]

But the unrelenting mix of cascading disruptions to the systems people rely on for basic necessities, and more frequent, extreme, and prolonged emergencies and disasters generated during the C-E-B crisis will cause many people to remain stuck in constant fight, flight, or freeze reactions. This will impede their wellness and resilience because it will leave them frozen outside their Resilience Growth Zone in a "high zone" where they are constantly wound up, manically worried about the past or future, edgy, agitated, or angry,

or they can become frozen in a "low zone" where they are always sad, depressed, numb, confused, or disconnected from reality.[2]

In both cases, the traumatic reaction they experience will remain embedded in their nervous system, hidden from view, and unaddressed.

If the fear-based reaction people experience is not surfaced, processed, and released the trauma can cause the brain to record separate fragments of the events. This can take the form of images, sounds, or physical sensations that lack a context. When individuals re-experience these sensations they can be reminded of past events, which activates fear and danger reactions to ongoing and future situations. This can lead them to unconsciously rehearse and reenact their traumatic experiences over and over again in their mind, and often in the physical world, as a means to find their way beyond it. The process can produce actual biological changes to their nervous system that can keep them frozen in an unhealthy high or low state outside their Resilience Growth Zone. [3]




Unless initiatives are launched worldwide to prevent and heal them, the stresses and traumas generated during the C-E-B crisis will cause billions of people to be continually frozen outside their Resilient Growth Zone. The result will be unprecedented levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, complicated grief, increased suicidal ideation, and other individual mental health problems.[4]

Being stuck in a high or low zone will also cause some people to misuse or become addicted to alcohol or other substances, or react aggressively or violently to anyone who seems threatening, including those who disagree with them or look, speak, or act differently. This will lead to even more spousal and child abuse and neglect, crime, interpersonal violence, and other psychosocial problems that adversely affect the safety, health, and well-being of others.[5]

The combination of these unhealthy and harmful reactions will be pervasive levels of individual distresses and traumas, as well as community and societal traumas.

Unless explicit steps are taken to address these dynamics, many people to fail to see or overlook opportunities that can enhance their wellness. Their attention will be riveted on scary, dangerous, and unpleasant things. Positive, helpful, and hopeful things will be ignored. This is why it is so important to build population-level capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience.

## II. What Building Population-Level Mental Wellness and Resilience Involves

The Handbook for "Start-Up" CRNs includes a short description of what we mean by building population-level mental wellness and transformational resilience, and how it applies to the C-E-B crisis. This section explains these processes in much more depth.

Having a good understanding of these issues is important because all of the strategies and activities utilized by a CRN should seek to enhance the processes and enable people to remain within their Resilience Growth Zone during adversities, and quickly return to their RGZ when they are pushed outside by severe stresses and acute traumas.

## What is Mental Wellness?

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities." It calls it "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community." Building on the WHO's definition, we use the term mental "wellness" rather than health to emphasize both "feeling good" and "functioning well."

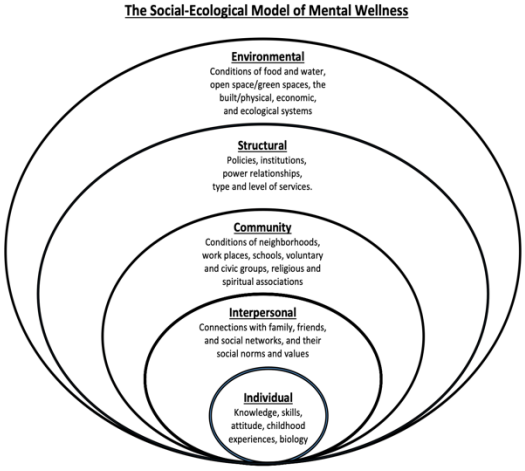
It is important to understand, however, that mental wellness is not a final or static state. Rather, it is a *process*, which means wellness ebbs and flows at different times.

As discussed above, most people experience long periods of mental wellness, but then get pushed out of their Resilience Growth Zone by some type of distressing event or series of events. After experiencing dysregulation, the majority of people find ways to bring themselves back into their Resilience Growth Zone that enables wellness.

The ability to recover and maintain a state of social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral wellness results from our *intentions*, the *choices* we make, and *actions* we take.

In other words, no one is superhuman. We are all ordinary people with flaws and imperfections. This means any person can be pushed outside of our Resilience Growth Zone and experience anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, grief, and other mental health struggles at some point in our lives. This will be especially true as the C-E-B crisis accelerates and everyone experiences different types of more frequent, extreme, and prolonged traumatic stresses and traumas.

The "Social-Ecological Model" describes the interacting forces that can influence mental wellness. [6]



Each level interacts with the others to influence mental wellness and resilience. Changes are required at all levels to prevent and heal climate distresses and traumas.

To some extent each person's capacity for mental wellness is influenced by the genetic characteristics they inherit. However, the experiences people have growing up, including how they were raised by their parents, have as much or more influence on mental wellness than inherited genetic traits.

Early childhood experiences are greatly influenced by the friends, neighbors, and social networks they and their family are involved with, and the social norms (accepted behaviors) and values (what is determined to be important) they promote.

These dynamics are, in turn, significantly influenced by the conditions of the neighborhoods and communities where people live, including the types of jobs and incomes that are available, the quality and availability of schools, civic and voluntary groups they can participate in, and by the religious and spiritual organizations that exist.

All of these factors are influenced by structural forces including the entities that hold economic and political power, the public policies they establish, and the institutions that promote and enforce the existing powers and authorities.

The environment in which people live, work, and recreate influence all of these forces. This includes the conditions of soils, open spaces, green spaces, levels and types of pollution, average temperatures and precipitation, and other ecological factors that shape the availability and types of food, water, shelter, jobs, and incomes, as well public health and other fundamental dimensions of wellness.

In sum, the social-ecological model underscores that context and circumstances significantly influence everyone's capacity for mental wellness. The key factor is what people experienced—what happened to them--not what is wrong with them.

Almost everyone has the capacity to prevent serious social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems, and heal when struggles occur and recover. Most humans have an innate capacity for wellness. To help all adults, adolescents, and young children strengthen and sustain their capacity for mental wellness during the decades-long C-E-B crisis, CRNs will need to establish conditions that empower them to choose healthy, safe, just, and equitable ways to perceive and respond to all types of adversities. This can be achieved by engaging residents in the five foundational protective factors described in this Handbook.

## What is Transformational Resilience?

While vital, enhancing mental wellness is not sufficient to deal with the adversities generated by the C-E-B crisis. We also need to strengthen everyone's capacity for resilience—or what we call *Transformational Resilience*.

Here's why.

The C-E-B crisis will continue to accelerate for decades and produce many known, and likely as many or more previously unseen types of traumatic stresses, emergencies, and disasters. Building resilience for these conditions will be essential. But building resilience for the C-E-B crisis requires far more than grit or "bouncing back" to previous conditions after adversities, which is what many people think resilience involves. That's because, as the crisis intensifies, it will often not be possible to bounce back to previous conditions. In

addition, bouncing back to pre-crisis conditions is not desirable for many people, or for the earth's climate, ecological systems, or biodiversity.

One reason is that the concept of bouncing back assumes that adversities end and give people time to return to previous conditions. However, the combination of C-E-B crisis-generated persistent traumatic stresses and more frequent, extreme, and prolonged emergencies and disasters will often leave people with little, or no time at all, to rest, recover, and return to pre-crisis status.

In addition, especially in higher-income nations, previous ways of living, including huge amounts of climate and ecologically damaging resource extraction, production, consumption, and waste generation, the extensive use of fossil fuels, ways that people isolate themselves from others and become socially and politically polarized, and other practices contributed to the C-E-B crisis, so bouncing back to pre-crisis conditions will often make the crisis worse.

Further, marginalized and impoverished populations, those who experience ongoing racism, sexism, and other systemic oppressions, and people who have been subjected to other forms of inequalities and unjust hardships don't want to return to previous conditions. They want to *increase* their sense of health, safety, and wellbeing substantially *above* pre-adversity levels.

The suffering caused by the C-E-B crisis can either defeat or empower us. It can defeat us if we refuse to acknowledge reality, insist on maintaining business-as-usual, and reject or oppose ideas and actions that can reduce the crisis to manageable levels.

On the other hand, the C-E-B crisis can empower us if we recognize the assumptions, beliefs, and practices that created the calamity, and use it as a powerful catalyst to learn, grow, and find new sources of meaning and purpose that give us courage and hope.

This is what we mean by Transformational Resilience. It is the ability of individuals, families, organizations, communities, and entire societies to remain in their Resilience Growth Zone and use adversities as catalysts to transform their thinking and actions to establish conditions that are *substantially healthier, safer, socially connected, just, equitable, climate-resilient, zero-emission, and ecologically regenerative* than previously existed.

<u>Like Mental Wellness, Transformational Resilience is a Process</u>

Transformational Resilience is not a specific outcome or end point. It is a *process*. The dynamics it embodies are an adaptation of what in psychology is often called "post-traumatic growth," "trauma-induced growth," or "adversity-based growth."

When applied to the C-E-B crisis, we believe Transformational Resilience is a much more helpful term. That's because it speaks to the fundamental changes in thinking and practices needed to prevent and heal individual and collective mental health and psychosocial

struggles, and transform our communities into socially, economically, and ecologically regenerative systems.

Transformation resilience involves three interactive phases that can be called the "Transformational Resilience Cycle."

The cycle begins when an event or series of events damages or destroys the things people value or harm those they care about. The shocks overwhelm their ability to make sense of what occurred, and shatters deeply held assumptions and beliefs about the way the world works and how they should think and act in life. In other words, they are pushed outside their Resilient Growth Zone.

Most people will go to great lengths to quickly regain control and return to pre-crisis thinking and practices. If that fails, they enter a period of disarray. They become disoriented and distressed because their self-identity, and the sense of meaning and purpose that guides their lives, are in chaos.

People who are firmly committed to maintaining their previous perspectives and actions typically have a hard time acknowledging or dealing with reality in many aspects of their lives. They adhere to rigid rules and ways of thinking and behaving and never consider anything different. Their rigidity becomes even more stringent when reality around them changes in significant ways. This will increasingly be the case as the C-E-B crisis accelerates.

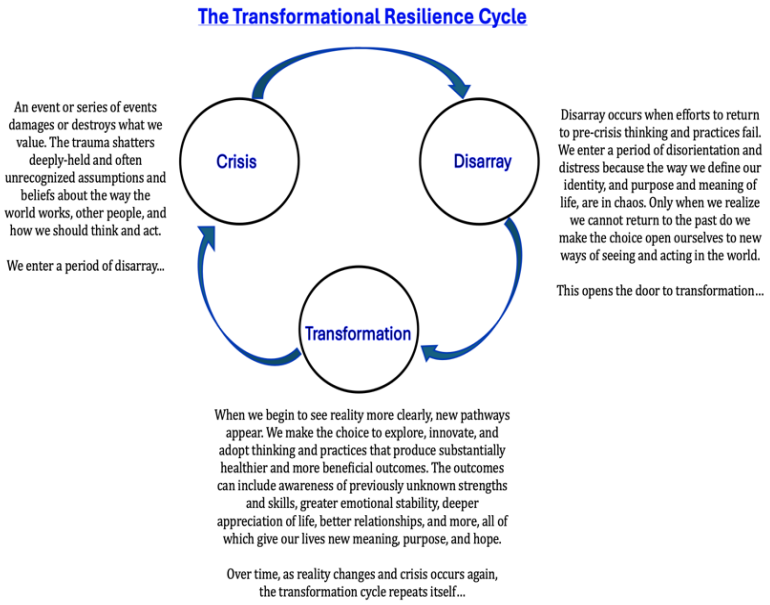
A person who can think and act in only one way usually has little self-awareness or self-control. Some feel overwhelmed, go numb, and disconnect from reality when serious adversities occur or conditions change (a process called dissociation). Others try to anesthetize themselves to the distress they feel through drugs, alcohol, food, or other practices that end up harming themselves, their families, or community. Still others blame and attack others for upsetting their lives, including their significant other or children, or people who look, think, or act differently. These reactions often harm the people they care about, and their community.

The refusal of many people to acknowledge reality today and adopt new perspectives and practices is also destroying the earth's climate and ecological systems and biodiversity that make all life possible.

It should be noted that some people struggle to adapt effectively to adversities, but eventually begin to make some progress, and then get stuck somewhere before achieving full recovery. They cannot return full time to their Resilient Growth Zone. The lack of a complete recovery often results from the way they perceive their situation.

The good news, however, is that when they realize they cannot maintain previous ways of thinking and acting, many people come to accept that reality has changed. They make the *choice* to use the disarray as stimuli to learn new things about the world and themselves. When this occurs they enter the transformation phase.

The transformation phase motivates people to begin to see reality more clearly. The limits of their previous ways of thinking and acting become evident, and they enter a period of learning and innovation that leads to new ways of perceiving and engaging with the world.




This typically opens the door to many new and beneficial pathways in their lives. They often discover skills and strengths they never thought they had, find deeper appreciation of life, and develop stronger relationships with others. Many people become more empathetic and more generous, which leads to greater happiness. They also experience greater emotional stability, and unearth other qualities that give their lives new meaning and direction.

These characteristics help people buffer themselves from and push back against traumatic stresses and traumas, stay in their Resilient Growth Zone or quickly return to it, and remain socially, psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally resilient during adversities. As part of this, they are often motivated to participate in actions that help reduce the C-E-B crisis to manageable levels, and help others engage as well.

If and when reality changes again and new crises occurs, the transformational resilience cycle will begin once more.

The role of a CRN is to establish the conditions in their neighborhood or community that empower residents to transform the way they think and act to stay in their Resilient Growth Zone, or rapidly return to it when they are pushed outside, and continually learn, innovate, and establish substantially healthier, safer, and more connected, just, equitable, zero-emission, climate-resilient, ecologically regenerative conditions.

**What Can Population-Level Mental Wellness and Resilience Look Like in Your Community?**

Here are some examples of what building universal mental wellness and transformational resilience can look and function like in your community.

- *Robust social connections and supports*: All residents have family, friends, or neighbors they can rely on to check in on them, and provide practical assistance and emotional support during severe prolonged stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

- *Active engagement by residents in providing mutual aid*: All residents have learned what mutual aid is and how they can engage with others in helping each other before, during, and after severe (toxic) stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

- *Widespread engagement in pro-social activities*: Community members are engaged in pro-social activities caring for pets or animals, or helping to establish safe, healthy, just and equitable, zero-emission, climate-resilient local physical/built, economic, or ecological conditions.

- *Good connections with local resources*: Residents know and can access all types of health care, human service, spiritual, and other types of resources in the community, and are connected to people and organizations that can provide food, water, shelter, power, and other essential resources during emergencies and disasters.

- *Positive childhood and adult education*: All adults, adolescents, and young children have access to affordable educational opportunities that enhance their understanding of the world and teach skills they can use to enhance their lives and the lives of others in safe, healthy, just and equitable ways.

- *Trauma and resilience-informed organizations and community*: Community leaders, organizations, and residents understand how their policies and practices can produce traumatic stresses and traumas that harm people, and alter the way they operate to prevent this from happening. Residents have also learned "Presencing" resilience skills to regulate and calm their body, mind, and emotions when they are distressed, as well as "Purposing" resilience skills to continually ask "what can I learn?" from adversities and find new sources of meaning, direction, and hope in them.

- *Ongoing opportunities to strengthen and sustain wellness and resilience*: Residents regularly engage in practices that help strengthen and sustain their capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience, such as finding ways to laugh often, practicing forgiveness for others and themselves, having compassion and empathy for those who struggle, engaging in activities that allow them to learn new things, and taking care of their physical health.

- *Ongoing engagement in trauma healing gatherings*: Residents regularly participate in trauma healing events that allow them to share the distresses they are experiencing

with others, hear how other residents are dealing with their distresses, and learn resilience skills that help them heal and recover from trauma in a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental environment.

- *Greater racial and cultural equity*: BIPOC residents are in leadership roles, racial and cultural disparities are decreased, and the community has a clear commitment to make a "just transition" when transforming physical/built, economic, and ecological conditions.

- *Continual open mindedness, innovation, and adaptation*: Local leaders and residents are committed to continually learn from adversities, alter long-held thinking, practices, and policies when they are found to be ineffective or counterproductive, and innovate to find safer, healthier, and more equitable and just methods.

- *Ongoing efforts to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and regenerate local ecosystems and biodiversity*: Connected to the previous point, local leaders and residents make continual efforts to find innovative ways to slash greenhouse gas emissions, eliminate the use of fossil fuels, and conserve and regenerate the natural environment.

- *Diminished interpersonal aggression and violence*: The attributes described above significantly reduce physical abuse and neglect of spouses and children, as well as verbal and physical aggression and violence toward others in the community.

- *Greatly increased sense of safety and security*: The attributes described above also provide residents with a greatly increased sense of safety and security. The belief that their neighborhood or community is a safe haven empowers people to engage in many types of pro-social activities and develop hope for the future.

- *Greatly reduced mental health struggles*: The combination of all of these characteristics can significantly reduce the prevalence of severe anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), complicated grief, suicidality, substance abuse, and other mental health and psychosocial problems.

These qualities combine to generate high and sustained levels of individual, family, group, organizational, and community mental wellness and transformational resilience.

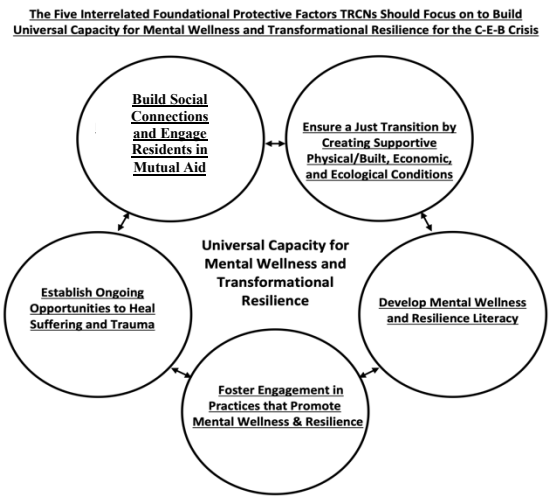
With these outcomes in mind, this Handbook will now explain the five foundational protective factors our research determined CRNs should emphasize in their strategies and action plans to build and sustain population-level mental wellness and transformational resilience for the C-E-B crisis.

## III. Five Foundational Protective Factors to Include in CRN Strategies

Our research identified five foundational protective factors that will be very important for CRNs to build and sustain population-level mental wellness and resilience during the long C-E-B crisis. The strategies developed by CRNs should actively engage residents in identifying and bolstering the aspects of each protective factor that already exist, and forming additional ones.

In the following pages the five foundational protective factors are described in a linear fashion. But in reality CRNs can begin by focusing on any of the protective factors that resonate with local residents. When people see progress in enhancing those skills, strengths, assets, and resources, a sense of hope will grow among them. This will often generate interest in strengthening some or all of the other protective factors.

It is also important to know that the five protective factors are all interrelated. Strategies that engage residents in strengthening one factor can be explicitly designed to concurrently strengthen others. For example, when engaging residents in becoming trauma and resilience-informed (see #3 below) a major focus can be placed on creating an environment that allows them to meet and engage with people they do not know. This will help build social connections and supports in the community, which is the first protective factor described below.




No matter which protective factors CRNs initially emphasize, their strategies should be designed to, over time, engage residents in the other ones.

In addition, each neighborhood and community is likely to identify a number of culturally and demographically unique protective factors that might complement the five described below, or address completely different factors. This is to be expected as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to building population-level mental wellness and transformational resilience for the C-E-B crisis. However, we encourage CRNs to find ways to eventually engage residents in each of the five foundation protective factors that are described in the following pages.

## 1. Build Social Connections and Engage Residents in Mutual Aid

Building social connections across geographic, economic, cultural, and racial boundaries in neighborhoods and communities, closely connected with engage residents in providing mutual aid to each other, is *by far* the most important protective factor CRNs should focus on. All of the CRNs activities should seek to establish, strengthen, and sustain social connections and engage residents in providing mutual aid.

This is because connections with family, friends, and neighbors are typically far more important during the first 3-5 days--or longer--of most emergencies and disasters than first-responders because they provide the mutual aid needed to survive and heal. Connections with people who can provide many types of practical assistance, as well as emotional support in a safe and healthy way are vital during periods of pervasive traumatic stresses.

Social isolation and loneliness are key drivers today of many types of mental health problems including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), increased suicidality and more, as well as physical health problems such as drug and alcohol abuse and family abuse that can result during severely stressful situations. One meta-analysis of research studies found that isolation and lack of social connections are twice as harmful to mental and physical health as obesity, and significantly increase the risk of premature mortality.[7]

### The Importance of Building Social Connections and Engagement in Mutual Aid

This information underscores that establishing and maintaining robust connections with family, friends, and other residents in the community and engaging them in providing mutual aid will, without a doubt, be the most important way CRNs can strengthen and sustain individual and collective mental wellness and resilience during the long C-E-B crisis. This is often called building "social capital" and in this section we will describe it as its own free-standing focus. [8] However, building robust social connections and providing mutual aid should also be a core focus of each of the other foundational areas that are essential to build and sustain universal capacity for mental wellness and resilience. [9]

As the social-ecological model describes, a substantial amount of research has found that anywhere between 40 percent to more than 80 percent of an individual's health and wellness can be directly or indirectly attributed to social factors. [10] In many ways, the relationships people have with others form the cornerstone of their lives. Research indicates that both the availability and perception of close family and friends who provide unconditional emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of safety, which is often called "strong ties," [11] or "bonding" social relationships, [12] help people function well, feel good, and respond constructively to adversities.

Having robust bonds with family and friends and having people you can count on to provide mutual aid have been shown to reduce the rates of anxiety and depression, produce higher self-esteem, generate greater empathy, and lead to more trusting and

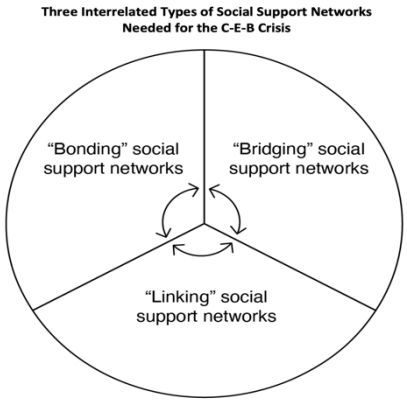
cooperative relationships. [13] Strong bonding relationships can also strengthen the immune system, help people recover from physical injury and disease, and lead to a longer life. Conversely, a lack of bonding relationships and feelings that one is cared for by others has significant harmful consequences for both mental health and physical health. [14]

In addition to helping people build strong bonds with family and friends, to enhance the entire population's capacity for mental wellness and resilience during the long C-E-B crisis, it will be equally important to build what are often called "weak ties" or "bridging" and "linking" social connections.

Bridging social support networks are connections between one's bonding network and other bonding networks in the community. They "bridge" the divides that typically separate people, such as race, class, religion, and geography, and help community members develop a sense of common destiny and build cohesion and collective efficacy. [15] Healthy bridging connections with people outside your bonding network can also activate a positive feedback loop, whereby those you interact with want to spend more time with you, which increases your connections with others, which enhances your capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience. [16]

Further, connecting your personal bonding network with other bonding networks in the community is important because research has found that in the first five days of a major disaster, survival depends largely on family and friends, not emergency responders. [17] They are who can provide the food, water, shelter, clothing, transportation, and other basic needs people require during and after emergencies and disasters.

Bridging social support networks often emerge through the informal associations people have with others. This means the groups of two to six people who meet for coffee or exercise together, and the bowling, knitting, woodwork, photography, bird watching, and many other types of groups people belong to. Most of these associations do not have a name. Yet, they are how people often meet others and develop relationships. [18] Bridging social support networks can also be developed through deliberate efforts by a CRN to bring together people from different locations in the community to engage in block parties, civic projects, celebrate events, and participate in other group activities.




These are called "weak ties" because people don't live with or share intimate details about their lives with people in their bridging network (if they did they would be part of their bonding network). However, these connections distribute vital information throughout the community, help people share and release the stress and trauma they experience, and in other ways help enhance their capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience.

The importance of bridging social support networks was made clear to Dr. Daniel Aldrich, the Director of the Security and Resilience Studies Program at Northeastern University, and one of the top researchers in the field, after he studied who survived and who did not after a tsunami hit India and an earthquake occurred in Japan. In India he found that people who fared best weren't those with the most money or the most power. They were people who knew lots of other people--that is, the most socially connected individuals. He found the same pattern in Japan. "Really, at the end of the day, the people who will save you, and the people who will help you," said Aldrich, "they're usually neighbors." [19]

Equally important to bonding and bridging networks during the long C-E-B crisis will be the development of vast numbers of "Linking" social support networks in communities. These are links between bonding and bridging networks and individuals and organizations with important resources such as food, water, shelter, and energy, or that hold significant economic or political power or official authority in the community.

An example is a relationship between a neighborhood member and staff from a local charity that can provide food and shelter during a wildfire or storm that damages residences. When the individual learns where these resources can be found, they share the news with their bonding and bridging networks, which quickly spread it throughout the community.

Another example is a relationship between a community member and an elected official that allows the individual to gain access and convince the official to stop a local utility from turning off the electricity in a low-income neighborhood in favor of a wealthier one during a storm-generated power outage. After the meeting, the community member tells their bonding and bridging networks about the discussion and urges everyone to contact the official to show their support. The social support networks then quickly spread the word and the official received significant pressure to act. [20]

As with bridging social support networks, linking networks are often called "weak ties" because they are usually not people one regularly interacts with or shares intimate details of their lives. However, this does not mean they are any less important than "strong ties." As vital as close ties are with family and friends, relationships with people outside one's bonding and bridging networks expand the psychological, emotional, and spiritual safety net that protects people from the negative effects of stressful events. [21]

## ***Core Elements of Social Capital***

This emphasizes the importance of building robust Bonding, Bridging, and Linking social support networks. “We need all three types of those ties during a shock,” said Dr. Aldrich. “Without them, things go really badly.” [22]

The fear, anxiety, lack of empathy, and polarization seen in many communities today can give the impression that most residents no longer have the capacity to develop relationships with others who look, act, or think differently. This is not accurate. When people take the time to listen to others they do not know, identify practical issues they are all concerned about, and talk about ways to address them, positive connections can occur. Creating a welcoming environment, practicing co-regulation skills, and providing a strong sense of safety and support are key elements of the process.

## Building Social Connections With Everyone--Don't Separate or Isolate!

CRNs should give a number of groups special attention when designing and implementing strategies to enhance mental wellness and transformational resilience by building robust social connections. Young people are one.

Core Elements of Social Capital

Bonding: "Strong" ties with family members and/or a circle of friends who provide emotional support and practical assistance when needed.

Bridging: "Weaker" but important ties that connect people across cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries and provide access to important ideas, information, resources, and support in the community.

Linking: "Weaker" but important connections between people with resources, authority, or power in the community that provide access to essential goods and services or can affect changes in practices, policies, and outcomes.

A global study completed in 2021 found that 59 percent of the 10,000 young people surveyed in 10 countries reported feeling very or extremely worried about the C-E-B crisis, and 84 percent were at least moderately worried. Moreover, youth also reported feeling afraid, angry, powerless, guilty, ashamed, despairing, hurt, grief, and depressed by climate disruption, making comments such as "humanity is doomed" and "people have failed to care for the planet." Most of those surveyed said the anxiety and distress was affecting their daily life and ability to function. Three-quarters of respondents aged 16-25 felt the "future is frightening." [23]

The U.S. Surgeon General issued a report in November of that same year that highlighted the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis, and the report identified the C-E-B crisis as a factor that shapes the mental health of young people. [24]

In addition to fears about the C-E-B crisis, many young people feel isolated today. A study by Harvard University in 2021 found that 61 percent of young adults in the U.S. felt "serious loneliness." In addition, 43 percent of young adults reported increases in loneliness after the COVID-19 pandemic began. Almost 50 percent of those young adults reported that no one in the past few weeks had "taken more than just a few minutes" to ask how they are doing in a way that made them feel like the person "genuinely cared." [25]

A study in the U.K. completed during the early stages of the pandemic found similar results. Thirty five percent of young people said they felt lonely often, or most of the time, despite spending three hours a day on social media.[26]

As with all other community members, to enhance the capacity of youth to prevent and heal climate-generated distresses and traumas, it will be essential to help them personally connect with others, learn simple Presencing emotional self-regulation resilience skills to calm their body, mind, and emotions, and engage in Purposing adversity-based growth resilience skills to find new sources of meaning, direction, and healthy hope for and faith in the future.

Most young people want to make a difference and help others. This desire can be enhanced by bringing youth together and helping them engage in activities that matter to them and make a difference in the lives of others or the condition of their community or local environment. When given the opportunity, the natural creativity of youth can be activated and all sorts of positive changes can result in their personal lives, schools, neighborhoods, or community. Engaging with others in these activities can help each youth realize they matter as people. When they see signs of progress, they will also realize that, every day, they can do something that helps others or helps reduce the C-E-B crisis to manageable levels. This can be very empowering and help build healthy hope.

An outstanding organization doing this type of work is the Mycelium Youth Network. It works in the San Francisco Bay area to "bridge the gap between the increasing incidents of climate-related disasters and the ability of young people, who will inherit the world, to respond to those challenges with creativity, courage, resilience, hope, and real-world practical skills and training." They focus on building ancestrally-grounded climate resilience and their work is free or offered at low cost to low-income youth in the area.

"Kids are always pushing against boundaries and looking for new ways to look at things that adults often don't want to do," said Founder and Executive Director Lil Milagro Henriquez. "It is very important to think big. We need new ideas on climate change. So we need to help youth think big."..."If you are building out work for young people, tie it to the climate plan of their city or state. This pushes policy makers to change."[27]

As they build social connections and engage in meaningful activities, youth can also learn what mental wellness and transformational resilience involve and how they can enhance these qualities within themselves and help others do so as well. They can also learn how to engage in the simple practices that can enhance their capacity for wellness and resilience that will be discussed in this Handbook. And, when young people are severely distressed or traumatized they can participate in the age-appropriate healing activities.

In addition to youth, special emphasis should be placed on the populations that, at least initially, are most vulnerable to the mental health and psychosocial impacts of the C-E-B crisis. They include communities that have experienced historical and current disinvestment, oppression, and marginalization, such as BIPOC residents, older adults who live alone, immigrants, and rural and low-income communities. It also includes communities located in high risk zones such as low-lying areas at risk of flooding. People with pre-existing mental health illness or mental health conditions are also at higher risk of climate-generated mental health or psycho-social-spiritual problems. [28]

However, great care must be given to avoid focusing on youth separately from adults, or on high risk or vulnerable populations in isolation from others in the community because this approach comes with significant risks. In a pattern seen time and again throughout history, when certain populations are defined as "vulnerable" or "at risk" people who are not members of those groups will discount their importance or show little concern about their plight. At the turn of the 19th century, for example, industrialized cities became incubators of diseases such as cholera and yellow fever, and the poor were the most at risk so little was done to address the problems. It was only when the diseases infected and killed the middle class and wealthier populations that the problems were fixed. The long C-E-B crisis will impact everyone and only when people realize this will meaningful change occur.

In addition, focusing on one subgroup or population separately from others can easily revert back to the fragmented and siloed approaches that dominate in many communities today. This could end up increasing the segregation and social isolation these populations already experience, and end up pitting them against other groups for attention, funding, and other resources.

To avoid these pitfalls, efforts to build the capacity for mental wellness and resilience among different subgroups should be integrated into a holistic population-level approach. To achieve this end, it will be essential to make youth, BIPOC and low-income residents, migrants, seniors, and others vulnerable populations equal partners in the CRN steering committee and on Resilience Innovation Teams that develop and implement strategies. Throughout all of these activities, it will be essential to increase everyone's connection with others, sense of belonging, and healthy hope.

## Effective Storytelling To Promote Safe, Healthy, Just, and Equitable Norms

Building robust bonding, bridging, and linking social support networks throughout a community are also key to countering harmful social norms because they can transmit stories that promote safe, healthy, just, equitable and ecologically regenerative thinking and behaviors.

The widely accepted and expected ways of thinking and acting that dominate some families, groups, and communities can lead people to believe that drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or misusing other drugs is a right of passage for adolescents or an acceptable way for adults to handle stress. Parents might believe that social norms endorse threatening or striking their children or using excessive physical restraints when they fail to follow their directives. Or social norms might make racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression acceptable, or even expected. These types of unhealthy, unsafe, unjust, and inequitable norms harm the people that promote them and those affected by them. In addition, the norms that dominate certain populations and communities can ignore the importance of, or even oppose, the need to conserve and regenerate the planet's climate system, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

To address these types of harmful norms, bonding, bridging, and linking networks can continually convey stories that promote healthy, safe, just, equitable, and ecologically regenerative standards of behavior.[29]

The stories that people repeatedly hear greatly influence how they think about the world and the way they act. For example, the major religions of the world are all based on stories that have shaped almost every aspect of human history. Storytelling that describes right ways of living has also been part of indigenous cultures for thousands of years.

More recently, research has recognized the power of storytelling to educate and influence people's thinking and behavior. [30] Digital storytelling with the elderly, for instance, was recently found to be associated with improved brain health, memory and social engagement. [31]

Similar findings have been observed for young children as well. [32] In addition, research has found that good storytelling can help people make meaning out of suffering and enhance healing from family violence, physical illness, disasters, and ecologically generated traumas. [33]

In short, good storytelling is vital to prevent and heal problems in almost every community and culture worldwide.

To strengthen the capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience and motivate people to engage in solutions to the C-E-B crisis, social support networks can transmit stories that emphasize intrinsic rather than extrinsic values. This means values such as gratitude toward others, social justice, and caring for the climate, ecological systems, and biodiversity that make our lives possible. These messages can counter the extrinsic values that have come to dominate many populations today that emphasize external approval or rewards such as power over others, wealth, and social status.

To accomplish this, stories must connect with the mental "frames" people hold--their internal psychological structures--that determine how they see the world and that shape their thinking and behavior. Most people hold some type of intrinsic values as part of their cognitive frame, though those values can often be forgotten or ignored when they are frozen in a fight or flight condition. The key is to connect with people, learn how they see the world, and then share stories that tap into the intrinsic values they hold that are part of their mental frame. [34]

Influential storytelling combines information with metaphors, symbols, images, and personal examples people can relate to that paint a picture in their mind of important ideas or messages. Facts and figures are important, but usually influence thinking and behaviors only when they are included in stories that speak to the personal experiences people have had and create empathy for others.

Good storytelling captures people's attention and makes it easier for them to process information when they are consumed by other tasks. Good storytelling also allows people

to put themselves in the same situation, which reduces defensiveness and helps them learn complicated concepts that can alter behavior and lead to positive change. In addition, good storytelling can expand adherence to pro-social norms by showing people that if others can do it, so can they.

Effective stories often include short phrases or images that symbolize an issue. The #MeToo movement, for example, quickly went global because a simple phrase told a story of sexual harassment or violence that many women related to, which empowered them to speak out about their own experience and demand change. The simple two-word phrase activated numerous changes. As the movement grew, for instance, several states passed laws prohibiting the use of nondisclosure agreements in sexual misconduct cases, a number of survivors of sexual abuse got financial restitution, and people who had never thought about sexual harassment before realized how much it had affected women they knew. [35] Many additional changes are likely in the future.

Powerful storytelling is also needed to paint a clear picture of important issues that are often obscured by powerful interests. This point was made by Jacqui Patterson. She is the founder and executive director of the Chisholm Legacy Project. Her organization is doing leading-edge work helping BIPOC residents, and black women in particular, working on the frontlines of climate justice obtain the resources they need to ensure a just and equitable transition from an "extractive to a living economy centered in caring for the earth, equity, and justice." Patterson said, "Big money uses narratives like 'natural gas' to make their product sound good when it is actually mostly methane that is harmful to people and the environment."..."We need narratives that clarify what is positive and what is negative." [36]

This underscores the importance of who tells the stories that dominate public attention. When the narratives are shaped by those with economic power they can often make people believe half-truths or outright falsehoods that fortify their domination. When those in power control the social narratives they can also prevent any other story from even being considered. This includes how people can live a meaningful life without the goods and services they provide, or the social, economic, religious or political ideologies they promote that aggravate the C-E-B crisis.

This is why it will be vital for CRN members to come together to continuously convey stories through their community's social support networks that help residents understand what appropriate prosocial behavior involves, and describe a real-world picture of how they can live a meaningful life in the midst of the long C-E-B crisis.

Good storytelling on its own, of course, cannot generate the changes needed to motivate people to enhance their capacity to prevent and heal distresses and traumas or engage in solutions to the C-E-B crisis. But effective storytelling is essential to produce these outcomes. For these reasons, it will be very important for RCC members to learn how to continually communicate stories that promote safe, healthy, just, equitable, and ecologically regenerative ways of thinking and acting.

*The Framework Institute* offers resources CRNs can use to learn how to craft and tell powerful stories for social change. [37] *Storytelling For Good* also offers helpful resources. [38] *The National Storytelling Network* includes links to storytelling resources for youth, educators, and other populations. [39]

## Building Social Connections and Engagement in Mutual Aid To Enhance Collective Efficacy

Using good storytelling to build robust social capital and engaging in mutual aid is a central element in creating "collective efficacy." This means that when numerous people share the belief that through their unified efforts they can overcome challenges and achieve important outcomes, they become more effective and increase the likelihood of achieving their goals.[40] For example, in communities where neighbors share the belief that they can band together to prevent crime, research has found significantly less of it.[41] Strong collective efficacy can also bring community members together to prevent social, economic, health, and other forms of inequity and injustices. [42] And, collective efficacy will be vital to empower residents to build universal capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience as they engage in actions that help reduce the C-E-B crisis to manageable levels.

It is important to realize that robust social capital and the collective efficacy it can create are difficult to measure because they are not concrete things like financial capital. They involve an ever-shifting network of relationships that must be continually nurtured. But the existence of hearty social capital and collective efficacy can be observed when neighbors assist each other, and when community members with different racial, cultural, economic, spiritual, or political affiliations join together to press for change and address important issues.

## Building Robust Social Connections To Help Overcome Today's Polarization

Building robust social connections and telling stories that alter harmful social norms and build collective efficacy can be difficult today. Numerous factors are causing many communities worldwide to become more divided and fragmented. In many locations the social capital required to address today's complex challenges seems to have dissipated. Social media and smart phones, for all the benefits they provide, have in many ways aggravated the problems because they do not provide protection from irresponsible communications or ways for people to interact and thoughtfully discuss issues face-to-face.

Only personal interaction can overcome the disconnection, isolation, and polarization that permeate today. As you will read about in a moment, holding neighborhood block parties, linking residents with similar interests, and engaging community members in addressing "kitchen table" issues they care about are constructive ways to develop personal connections.

## Communicating with People Who Hold Different Psychological Frames

Taking the time to get to know your neighbors and other community residents and understand their psychological frames is an essential part of this process. This does not involve sharing facts or figures. Instead, the starting point is to take the time to brainstorm what you might have in common with people who you believe hold different beliefs and perspectives from your own. This could be a value you share, such as caring for your children, saving money, or living in a safe place. It could also be things you might both enjoy such as gardening or being outdoors.

The next step is to prepare for the conversation by thinking through how to link the issues you might have in common with mental health and psycho-social-spiritual issues and the benefits of reducing your community's contributions to the C-E-B crisis. For example, you could talk about how your child is now constantly distressed and worried about what the future holds given the accelerating disasters they see on TV and social media. Another example could be to talk about how hotter temperatures, heat waves, and droughts are making it difficult for you to enjoy the outdoors, or reducing the number and type of vegetables you can grow in your garden, while driving up the costs of water to irrigate them.

When these links become clear, the next step is to connect them with possible solutions that speak to the things you might have in common with the person. To follow from the previous example, you might mention that you have decided to help your child find healthy hope by installing LED energy efficient lighting throughout your house to reduce your electrical consumption and save money, or that you are purchasing an electric vehicle to eliminate the high costs of gasoline and reduce your ecological footprint. Or you could share that you are going to plant more trees in your yard to cool it during heatwaves, or install a drip-irrigation system in your garden to ensure sufficient water for the growing season and save money.

After preparing in this way, be ready to listen closely to the people you interact with. Good listening involves dropping any assumptions you have about who the people are, making them feel safe and welcome, and trying to truly understand what they are saying. Keep listening for things you agree on. When you find something you have in common, actively engage in discussions with respect and empathy and avoid any hint of dismissiveness, even if their perspective seems factually incorrect, biased, or just plain wacky.

## Examples of How CRNs Can Intentionally Build Strong and Weak Social Connections

*Neighbouring For Climate*, operated by the city of Edmonton, Canada, is one of the best programs that explicitly focuses on building social capital. "In the same way that physical nutrients are so important for our health, so are three relational nutrients important to our physical and mental health," said Howard Laurence, program coordinator. "They are family, friends, and neighbors." [43]

Neighbouring for Climate develops these relational nutrients by having a local volunteer--a block connector--go door-to-door interviewing people on their block (which includes about 20 households) to ask about their skills, gifts, interests, and ideas for the neighborhood. They also ask if they are willing to share their interests with others in the neighborhood. The information is inserted into an online database that is shared with all the neighbors. This allows residents to learn who in their area has similar interests, and helps them connect with them to share their skills or passions. For example, people who like to do woodworking, knitting, or take early morning walks can meet and engage in these activities with others with similar interests. The block connectors also keep residents informed about upcoming neighborhood parties and other local events. Two thirds of the 173 neighborhoods in Edmonton now have a block connector, and they help residents connect at the block level, host block socials, form local groups, and in other ways build social capital.

To support the block connector program, the city's Neighbouring for Climate program developed a Resource Guide that describes the role of the connectors and how they can engage with their neighbors. In addition, it developed a Guide describing the entire program and the different roles residents can play in building social connections. And, during the COVID-19 pandemic they distributed "Connected Neighbours" cards that were filled out by individuals who wanted to help people who were isolated, quarantined, or in other ways experiencing challenges. The knowledge of who was interested in helping others assisted many residents. All of these resources can be found on their website. [44]

An assessment completed in 2020 found that 84.2 percent of Block Connectors felt a lot more or moderately more connected to their block (immediate neighbors) and 61.5 percent felt a lot more or moderately connected to their neighborhood. The majority of Block Connectors also reported additional benefits including a "strengthened sense of connection, enhanced existing relationships, and increased overall wellbeing being the largest." In addition, "66.7 percent had neighbors that joined existing groups because of their connecting work, and 45.2 percent had created new groups to socialize, share, and learn from each other."

The 2020 assessment also found the majority of neighborhoods involved with the program are addressing two or more of the seven responsibilities of a neighborhood defined by John McKnight. [45] Thirty two percent were enabling the health of residents; seventy five percent were assuring safety and security; thirty one percent were stewarding the environment; Sixteen percent were nurturing and shaping the local economy; Forty percent were contributing to local food production; twenty percent were assisting with raising children; and forty four percent were providing community care. Only 0.04 percent said they were not engaged in addressing any of these responsibilities. [46]

These findings indicate that Abundant Community Edmonton is establishing social connections that produce significant benefits for residents.

The *Neighborhood Empowerment Network (NEN)* in San Francisco, California was another outstanding initiative that was focused on building the social capital required to enhance

community resilience for climate and other adversities. Hosted by the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management, the NEN was comprised of nonprofits, government agencies, foundations, faith based and academic institutions and civic networks that are committed to establishing and maintaining local cross-sector networks at the neighborhood level that work year round to advance a community's resilience at the individual, organizational and community levels. (Unfortunately, after many years of success for budgetary and other reasons the city discontinued the NEN).

The NEN's goal was to establish a cohort of neighborhood stakeholders that may be called upon to activate during a disaster by convening them together in advance to strengthen their capacity to protect the community's most vulnerable residents. Cohort members were identified by local civic leaders using an asset mapping exercise that flags local stakeholder organizations that either manage essential resources or serve vulnerable populations. Once identified, the stakeholders were convened in a strategic planning workshop that features a tabletop exercise that challenges participants to respond to an earthquake for 72 hours with no meaningful support from the government and use only the resources that are in the community at the time of the disaster.

The goals of the exercise were the following:

- Map the assets and resources available in the community;

- Increase awareness and interoperability amongst local agencies of the crucial role they will play in the response to the disaster and related challenges;

- Increase the level of interoperability and trust between the community and the government first response agencies;

- Identify any gaps that the community will face in meeting the care and shelter needs of their most vulnerable residents;

The identified gaps were converted into goals and objectives that are included in a Resilience Action Plan (RAP) that guides the investments of the community as they advance their resilience goals. The RAP also hosted a risk/hazard assessment that leverages local knowledge of their neighborhood's risks as well as a governance framework that provides a flexible platform for local leadership to make decisions before, during, and after emergencies. The RAP is a dynamic asset and is updated annually to accommodate social, cultural, and economic changes.

Over the course of a decade, the NEN created a suite of programs in concert with its partner communities that are housed in the NEN's Empowered Communities Program. The programs included:

- The HUB, which was the name for the local cross sector network of stakeholder organizations that are actively participating in the community's resilience development work before, during and after a disaster. At the center of the HUB is an anchor

institution that has the political capital to establish and maintain the network and coordinate the implementation of its Resilience Action Plan.

- The Neighborfest Program, which used the fun of the traditional block party to advance the disaster resilience of a block by increasing the readiness of residents to meet the care and shelter needs of their most vulnerable neighbors as they shelter in place during times of stress. By leveraging the Neighborfest Host Playbook, Host Committees acquire the relationships, skills and resources to be there for their neighbors when they need help the most.

- Resilient Leadership Academies for adults and youth that empowered them to become stakeholders in advancing their community's resilience goals in the face of stressors such as climate change and earthquakes.

The NEN found that engaging residents in these types of ground-up planning processes builds a "soft" culture of trust and reciprocity and a "hard" list of goals and objectives. Residents not only develop connections with people they previously did not know, they also develop trust in first responder organizations and city agencies that are important during disasters and emergencies. All this built the social efficacy required to enhance and sustain individual and collective resilience during stressful situations.

An assessment completed in 2020 of the Neighborfest Program's contribution to the ability of participants to support their neighbors while the sheltered in place (SIP) during the COVID-19 lockdown found remarkable results: [47]

- 81 percent of hosts believed that the Neighborfest significantly elevated the level of social cohesion within their communities.

- 100 percent of hosts believed that the relationship building component of Neighborfest made it easier to identify neighbors that either needed help or could help those around them while they shelterer in place during COVID-19

- 86 percent of hosts felt that Neighborfest enhanced their community's preparedness for the COVID-19 SIP orders.

Although the study focused on the COVID-19 lockdown, it demonstrates the effectiveness of the approach for many types of adversities.

"No one organization or agency can save a community," said Daniel Homsey, former director of the NEN. "We need ground-up resilience based on relationships and trust between residents, non-profits, the Red Cross, faith organizations, the private sector, academic organizations, and others." [48]

CRNs can use these initiatives as models to develop their own unique age and culturally appropriate ways to build social capital in their neighborhood or community.

Other Ways CRNs Can Build Robust Social Connections Across Boundaries

- *Model the Importance of Building Social Connections During All CRN Meetings and Events*: CRNs should prioritize building social connections in all of its meetings and in every activity it sponsors. This can be done, for example, by taking time to allow CRN steering committee and Resilience Innovation Team members to connect and share what is on their minds, and also offering ways for observers at events to meet and engage with each other. The key point CRN members should always keep front-and-center is that building social connections is as or more important than any specific physical deliverables they produce.

- *Organize a Social Capital Resilience Innovation Team*: CRNs should organize an innovation team composed of people from different neighborhoods, civic, non-profit, private, and public organizations who jointly plan and implement ways for neighbors and different populations and sectors to continually interact with and create social connections with people they don't know. This can include block parties, clean-up events, tree plantings, community gardening, and other types of civic activities. Free busing, ride shares, biking, walking, and other forms of transportation should be organized to help people travel to the events, and whenever possible food and beverages should also be provided. Here are some examples of ways that Social Capital Resilience Innovation Teams can build social support networks across boundaries in their community:

    - *Organize Resilience Hubs Across the Community*: The examples described in this chapter offer different ways to form Neighborhood Resilience Hubs. It should be a top priority to organize them throughout the community. In addition to helping residents prepare for and respond effectively to disasters and emergencies, the relationships they build will be extremely important to enhance and sustain the capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience during the long C-E-B crisis. Vashon Island in Washington State has over 200 hubs, all run by volunteers. In addition to building social connections, they provide emergency radios and TVs that allow people to find out what is happening, and other resources for emergencies.[49] Climate Crew works across the US with libraries, churches, schools, non-profits, and other community organizations to establish Climate Resilience Hubs that help residents respond to extreme weather events. [50]

    - *Organize "Making Connections" Events*: To address social isolation among San Diego's East African refugee population, the Prevention Institute and United Women of East Africa Support Team launched the Making Connections Initiative. Participants co-developed a "culturally- and community-rooted space" in which to gather, connect, and support each other. Having this safe space helped them experience a sense of belonging and to grow their collective capacity to identify and advocate for solutions to challenges such as the lack of affordable housing, educational, and employment opportunities. Prevention Institute has facilitated similar projects in many U.S. cities, and CRNs can work with them, or establish their own unique Making Connections initiative.

- *Organize "Meet Me" Events*: CRNs can use the "Meet Me Downtown" program developed in Phoenix, Arizona as a model to get diverse residents together. These are after-work mixer and fitness events held weekly that get people out on the streets and into local bars and restaurants. A variety of walking and running routes direct people to different neighborhoods and businesses that offer deals for those who make it there.[51]

- *Close Streets to Show Movies or Plays Outdoors*: CRNs can work with neighborhoods and local governments to close off a street or find a location where movies or plays produced by local actors can be shown to any resident who want to attend. Taking It To the Streets offers an example RCCs can follow. [52]

- *Make a "Table" for Neighborhood Conversations*: Much like the San Francisco NEN, CRNs can help community members organize ice cream parties or hold potlucks that bring diverse residents together to meet, eat, and talk**.** The Longest Table, organized in Tallahassee, Florida, offers an example. [53]

- *Set up "Nextdoor" Social Media Sites*: CRNs can encourage the use of Nextdoor or other social media platforms that allow neighbors and local organizations to connect electronically and share information. It is being used throughout the U.S. and in many parts of the European Union. My wife and I are members of a Neighborhood Association that uses Nextdoor to communicate.

- *Utilize Resources Available from Key Organizations in the Field*: The Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness, and its sister organizations the Foundation for Social Connection and Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection, have numerous studies, methods, and tools CRNs can use to build robust social connections in their community.[54]

You get the idea. There are numerous ways CRNs can bring residents together to get to know each other and develop social capital. CRNs should actively engage local residents in discussions about how to build social connections. The CRN's ultimate goal should be to make the creation of robust social connections and personal and collective efficacy a community expectation and norm.

The chart provided at the end of this chapter can be used by CRN members to determine the extent to which they have addressed the key elements of building robust social support networks in the community.

Engaging residents in actions that create supportive local physical/built, economic, and ecological conditions in the community is one of the best ways to build robust social support networks. This is the topic of the next section.

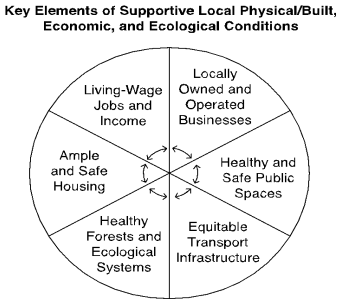
Checklist

To what extent is the CRN building robust social support networks across boundaries in the

| | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do CRN steering committee and Resilience Innovation Team members have a good grasp of the importance of building robust social capital in their community? | | | |
| Does the CRN have a strategy to build robust Bonding relationships in the community? | | | |
| Does the CRN have a strategy to build robust Bridging relationships in the community? | | | |
| Does the CRN have a strategy to build robust Linking relationships in the community? | | | |
| Does the CRN have a strategy to encourage local Bonding, Bridging, and Linking social support networks to share stories that promote safe, healthy, just, equitable, and resilient norms of behavior? | | | |
| Does the CRN have a way to determine the extent to which social capital is being enhanced in the community? | | | |

## 2. Ensure a Just Transition by Creating Healthy, Safe, Just and Equitable, Zero-Emission, Ecologically-Regenerative Climate Resilient Communities

The need for a just transition applies to local physical/built conditions, including transportation, housing, and public spaces. It is also urgently needed in the energy, jobs, and economic sectors. Further, a just transition is necessary to ensure that efforts to conserve and regenerate local ecological systems and species occur in an equitable manner.




Residents feel the impacts of unhealthy, unsafe, and unjust local conditions, so they often point to some aspect of local physical/built, economic, or ecological conditions as their top concerns when asked what they care about most in their community.

Building healthy, safe, just, and equitable, zero-emission, climate-resilient local physical/built, economic, and ecological conditions can increase the mental and physical health, safety, and resilience of residents. Focusing on these practical issues can also help communities overcome the isolation and disconnection many people experience today, often leading to social and political divisiveness. These actions are essential to reduce the community's contribution to the C-E-B crisis, prepare for and adapt to its impacts, and create substantially better conditions.

CRNs need to make building supportive local physical/built, economic, and ecological conditions one of the five foundational focuses of their efforts to build universal capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience. As the social-ecological model underscores, the conditions of the places where people live, play, recreate, learn, and age significantly influence their capacity for mental wellness, transformational resilience, and physical health.

### *A. The Need for Zero-Emission, Climate-Resilient Transportation, Housing, and Other Aspects of Local Physical/Built Infrastructure*

As with the other foundational areas involved with strengthening universal capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience, entire communities must be involved in creating safe, healthy, just, and equitable, low/zero emission, climate-resilient local transportation, housing, and open spaces. Residents should be actively engaged and lead these efforts because the conditions of this physical/built infrastructure directly affect their lives.

"This work requires a collaborative approach," said Risa Wilkerson, Executive Director of Healthy Places by Design. "We have found that when you promote local capacity and leadership for collaboration, the work can build momentum for longer-term results… This

requires that professionals take a step back and support local efforts… Social connection is a virtuous cycle. It builds on itself and leads to move civic engagement."

Climate Resilient Communities (CRC), which operates in the southern peninsula of the San Francisco Bay area, builds alliances between local residents, schools, local governments, and community-based organizations to help under-resourced communities build physical resilience from climate-related impacts such as sea level rise and economic instability.

CRC's Climate-based Adaptation program works with and manages the North Fair Oaks Climate Ready Team and the East Palo Alto Climate Change Community Team. It responds to community priorities by establishing programs to help them prepare for and adapt to sea level rise and other climate impacts.

Executive Director Violet Wulf-Saena said that even when government funding exists to prepare homes for climate impacts, such as the state of California now provides, most low-income households don't know about it, don't know how to apply, or find the application process too complicated. So CRC created the Resilient Home program that helps families in the East Palo Alto and Belle Haven areas access funds to install new roofing solar panels and prepare for climate impacts.

"My experience has been that solutions identified by communities actually do work in protecting people and helping them survive," said Wulf-Saena. "It is not what government prioritizes, it is what communities prioritize that is key."

### *B. Build Healthy, Safe, Just and Equitable, Zero-Emission Climate-Resilient Local Economic Conditions*

**Model Regenerative Economic Conditions During CRN Meetings and Events.** CRNs can show their commitment to building a just and equitable climate-resilient local economy by purchasing goods and services for events from locally owned and operated companies that pay their employees living wages, even if they are more expensive than huge chain stores can provide.

**Organize a Regenerative Economy Resilience Innovation Team.** The teams should jointly plan and implement actions that spur the growth of locally owned and operated small businesses that produce ecologically restorative goods and services. As they do so, the capacity for mental wellness and resilience of everyone involved will be enhanced. Examples include:

**Adopt a Community Bill of Rights.** To ensure a just transition to a socially, economically, and ecologically healthy and equitable restorative economy, CRNs can push for adopting a local Community Bill of Rights (CBR). A CBR moves decision-making away from the top-down, centralized government and corporate decision-making that dominates many communities to one that empowers residents to make just and equitable decisions on issues that affect their community and their lives.

**Follow the Institute for Local-Self-Reliance's Twelve Recommendations.** The ILSR issued a report in January 2022 describing twelve ideas CRNs can use to make small business development the driving force in their local economic development strategies. They include:

1. Build a strong infrastructure to cultivate, grow, and support small businesses
2. Close the racial entrepreneurial gap
3. Develop grocery stores in underdeveloped communities
4. Cultivate small-scale manufacturing and local and regional supply chains
5. Improve small business procurement policies and practices
6. Buy commercial property and place it in a community land trust
7. Create local delivery services
8. Promote small businesses and shopping small
9. Capitalize a publicly owned bank
10. Support employee business ownership
11. Improve broadband access for small businesses;
12. Invest in commercial district improvements that help small businesses.

**Educate and Train the Adult Workforce.** Workforce development and job readiness programs must enhance working-age people's knowledge, skills, and capacities to engage in cradle-to-cradle business development and jobs.

**Organize Economic Regeneration Consulting Services.** BRING is a non-profit organization in Springfield, Oregon, that offers a wide range of services that help local businesses shift to a cradle-to-cradle economic model.

Their Rethink program provides free hands-on advice to local firms on reducing waste, recycling more, and efficiently using electricity, water, and materials. Businesses that meet certain benchmarks receive a Rethink Recognition Award and publicity for their efforts. BRING's consulting services offer local firms fee-based greenhouse gas inventorying, waste studies, and other technical services. Their Construction Materials Recovery and Reuse Program promotes sustainability in the local building community.

**Provide Innovative New Sources of Capital.** Access to capital is often a major barrier to starting a business. In Seattle, some business owners have bypassed traditional lenders and used crowdfunding to bankroll aspiring firms.

As part of Washington state's Fund Local Program, dozens of businesses turned to a hybrid form of crowdfunding developed by Community Sources Capital for the funds to open or expand their operations.

**Establish "Shop Local" Campaigns.** Much like the Institute for Local Self-Reliance's report calls for, "Shop Local" and "By Local" campaigns are important because they can motivate residents to support local businesses by maximizing their purchase of goods and services.

CRNs can use the approach developed by Connect Our Future to establish Shop Local campaigns.

**Grow Community Farms.** Fresh vegetables provide both economic and health benefits for everyone, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income residents who live in food deserts. To ensure that residents have healthy foods, CRNs can support food systems grounded in justice and equity by mirroring the approach developed by Soul Fire Farm, an Afro-Indigenous-centered community farm located in New York "committed to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system."

The farm trains "the next generation of activist farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination." Their food sovereignty programs "reach over 160,000 people each year, including farmer training for Black and Brown growers, reparations and land return initiatives for northeast farmers, food justice workshops for urban youth, home gardens for city-dwellers living under food apartheid, doorstep harvest delivery for food insecure households, and systems and policy education for public decision-makers."

**Plant Urban Orchards and Gardens.** CRNs can use the model the Chicago Rarities Orchard Project developed to plant orchards in city parks, squares, and other locations that provide local residents with fruit, shade, and beauty. They can also use the American Community Gardening Association's resources to start and maintain community gardens in public spaces.

**Help Households Reduce Their Carbon Footprint.** Sustainable Ballard and its sister organization, Groundswell Northwest, an all-volunteer organization in Seattle, Washington, created a menu of actions households can take to reduce their carbon footprint. Each action was assigned a specific number of points. If a household could reach a specific total, it was awarded a Green Household yard sign. Many people engaged, and CRNs can use a similar approach to help households reduce their ecological footprint.

These examples are again offered merely to demonstrate that there are many ways CRNs can help build supportive local economic conditions. CRN members should innovate and develop strategies that resonate with residents.

3. *Create Healthy, Safe, Just, Equitable, Climate-Resilient Regenerative Ecological Conditions*

The health of local air and water, the vitality of ecological systems, and biodiversity also affect mental health and psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing. Separation from nature can also produce mental health problems.

Efforts to replenish local ecological systems, including investments in soil health, will also help communities in other ways. Ecological protection and regeneration programs can help communities conserve and regenerate the open spaces they value, protect clean air and water, and enhance human health.

**Model Ecologically Regenerative Practices During CRN Meetings and Events.** CRNs can demonstrate their commitment to restoring both local and global ecological systems by using 100 percent recycled paper, nontoxic writing instruments, cups and dishes that can be reused, and other ecologically sound materials at all meetings and events. When they are available, the CRN can hold events in facilities powered by solar panels or other clean, renewable energy sources.

CRN members can also calculate their own personal and household ecological footprints, share what they found with other coalition members and the public, and publicize how they reduce them. They can calculate and continually reduce the ecological footprints of events they hold and let residents know about them.

**Organize Local Ecological Regeneration Innovation Teams.** The teams can actively engage residents and many types of civic, non-profit, private, and public organizations in crafting and implementing strategies that help local organizations eliminate pollution and other forms of ecological harm throughout their entire value chain.

Like the two examples described above, the Innovation Teams can also engage residents in regenerating local forests, grasslands, waterways, wetlands, and biodiversity and planting trees, flowers, and other vegetation throughout the community.

**Organize Habitat Restoration Teams.** Every year, Save the Bay, an NGO in the San Francisco area, engages thousands of volunteers to plant upward of 20,000 native plants across the Bay Area to restore wetland transition zone habitat for wildlife. The number of plants and species planted at a restoration site, the pounds of invasive species removed, and other benefits have been enormous. CRNs can follow this approach and engage volunteers of all ages in restoring local ecological systems and species. They can also engage K-12 schools, higher education institutions, civic organizations like the YMCA and Rotary, and other groups and institutions in ongoing ecological restoration efforts.

**Form Local Watershed Councils.** When watersheds (river basins) have multiple land owners, the actions of any of them, as well as the users, can undermine the health of vegetation, soils, riparian areas, ground and surface water, and avian, terrestrial, and aquatic species. Accordingly, all land owners, managers, and regular users must be engaged in efforts to conserve and restore a basin.

CRNs can organize Watershed Councils to achieve this. These are voluntary, community-based, non-regulatory groups that come together regularly to analyze the health of their watershed and plan and implement projects to conserve and restore them. Most watershed councils work with government agencies and private landowners, and many, but not all, have paid staff. CRNs can use this model to establish this type of collaborative group in their area. They can also advocate for state/provincial and national policies to authorize, support, and fund these community-based ecological conservation and restoration initiatives.

**Organize Neighborhood Tree Planting and Park Development Events.** Hundreds of residents in Seattle Ballard Neighborhood, organized block by block, have also planted 1,200 street trees in one day. Groundswell Northwest has created twenty parks during the past twenty years, including areas reforested with native plants and creating a salmon estuary. CRNs can engage the Neighborhood Resilience Hubs, which help organize and many other neighborhood groups in similar activities.

**Promote Urban and Rural Rewilding.** Rewilding restores an area to its original uncultivated condition. It shifts management away from the centuries-long practices aimed at providing for human needs and incorporates indigenous practices with new landscape designs to allow wildness to reclaim an area. Many rewilding efforts occur in wild areas, including reintroducing biodiversity high up in the food chain to stabilize other species.

The reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park in 1995 is an example. But cities ranging from New York to Tokyo are also beginning to rewild by reintroducing native species, creating parks in open spaces and empty lots, and simply allowing nature to reclaim open spaces. CRNs can connect with the Global Rewilding Alliance and other organizations for information about how they can engage in wilding.

As before, these ideas are offered merely to spur the creativity of CRN members. The coalition can engage community members in many other ways to protect and restore local ecological systems. The key is to keep thinking outside the box.

***CRNs Will Need to Support Residents Involved with Activism***

Effective advocacy involves several important ingredients. One is that all new proposals or policies that activists push for should be thoroughly researched, and residents should be asked for their input to ensure it meets their needs. Media campaigns are also essential to generate sufficient pressure on business executives and elected officials to adopt a new practice or policy, and the campaigns often need to begin long before the specifics of new policy proposals are made public.

It will be vital for CRNs to help people involved with advocacy learn and continually practice both Presencing and Purposing resilience skills because these practices will help them calm their body, mind, and emotions as they engage in the work and use setbacks as catalysts to find new meaning, purpose, and healthy hope.

Activists will also need to devote time to develop the camaraderie and trust needed among their group to support each other in difficult times and avoid "eating their young" during times of stress. Using the principles and methods involved with finding healthy hope will also be very important. Above all, advocates must be willing to keep at it because any major change takes time. If advocates continually support each other, keep innovating and crafting new strategies, and remain relentless, *they can succeed*!

*Engaging Residents in a Just Transition Is Essential*

Just transition initiatives include three ingredients

1. Active participation of affected communities in planning and advancing actions

2. Anticipation of negative impacts through long-term planning and thorough impact assessments to foresee and address negative impacts and let people adapt through a gradual transition

3. Ongoing support through targeted financial programs and capacity building that prioritizes the most vulnerable.

A just transition requires that decisions about how and where to construct supportive transportation systems, housing, and public spaces must be made with the active involvement of community members–especially BIPOC residents and low-income groups–not government agencies or corporate interests on their own because the decisions about what occurs will affect their lives.

Similarly, residents must be actively engaged in decision-making about addressing polluting industries, landfills, and incinerators and restoring local ecological systems because those decisions will impact their families and them. Decisions on all these issues must ensure justice and equity for every population and neighborhood. As they have throughout history, women can play a very important leadership role in a just transition.

Residents' social connections with others as they engage in these activities will be as important as any specific external physical or policy changes achieved. The more people develop relationships with others, the greater the likelihood they will be able to feel good and function well during the long C-E-B crisis. This can also motivate them to become interested in other ways they can enhance their mental wellness and resilience.

## Checklist

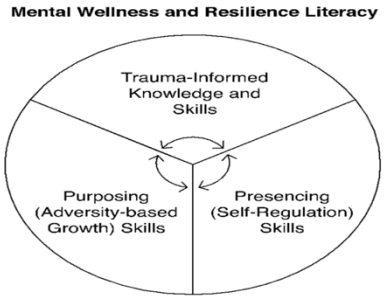
For ensuring a just transition

| | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did the CRN develop and implement strategies to build safe, healthy, just, and equitable zero-emission climate-resilient local transportation systems? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop and implement strategies to build safe, healthy, just, and equitable zero-emission climate-resilient housing? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop and implement strategies to build safe, healthy, just and equitable zero-emission climate-resilient public spaces? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop and implement strategies to support local entrepreneurs in maintaining existing businesses and creating new locally-owned businesses that use cradle-to-cradle practices and provide living-wage jobs? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop and implement strategies to help local businesses eliminate ecological impacts throughout their value chain and in their products and services? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop and implement safe, healthy, just, and equitable climate-resilient strategies to conserve and regenerate local ecosystems and biodiversity? | | | |
| Has the CRN taken steps to support activists who decide to become involved with pushing for new practices, regulations, and policies? | | | |
| Has the CRN taken explicit steps to ensure that all its efforts to create supportive local built/physical, economic, and ecological conditions are done in ways that ensure equity and justice? | | | |

### 3. Create Universal Literacy About Mental Wellness and Resilience

Another foundational area that will be essential for CRNs to focus on during the long C-E-B crisis is to help everyone understand what mental wellness and resilience involve and how to care for and sustain them. This can be called mental wellness and resilience literacy. It flows from the concept of health literacy, which is the "degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions."

Specifically, mental wellness and resilience literacy involve building the entire population's understanding of:




- How traumas and persistent, overwhelming traumatic stresses can affect their body, mind, emotions, and behaviors, and undermine their mental wellness and resilience;

- Simple, self-administrable "Presencing" (or self-regulation and co-regulation) resilience skills and methods they can use to recognize signs of problems and deliberately calm themselves;

- Simple, self-administrable "Purposing" (or adversity-based growth) resilience skills and methods they can use to turn toward and learn from adversities and find new meaning, direction, and healthy hope;

- Knowledge and skills that enable them to support other people who experience mental health or psycho-social-spiritual problems;

- Knowledge of when and how to seek personal assistance and treatment for uncontrollable problems.

Enhancing these capacities will be extremely important during the constant stresses and adversities generated during the C-E-B crisis.

*Support Trauma and Resilience-Informed Approaches*

Dealing with distressing experiences generated by C-E-B crisis-driven cascading disruptions to essential systems and acute disasters will often feel overwhelming--as though all the world's pressures are upon us. Being trauma-informed relies on an ongoing commitment to learning and growth.

The field is too nascent, and we are always learning more about the brain-mind-body connections, so we must remain curious as we move forward, as it has been said that when people consider themselves “trauma-informed,” that is often when the work stops.

Trauma-informed approaches integrate safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, voice choice and empowerment, and recognizing the impacts of cultural, historical, and gender issues. Trauma-informed systems across all levels realize how trauma can affect people and groups, recognize the signs of trauma, have systems that can respond effectively to trauma, and resist traumatization and re-traumatization

The trauma-informed movement works to acknowledge that many people experience trauma and impacts individuals, families, and communities differently, and support universal precautions so those who have experienced trauma, as well as those who have not, can thrive.

We must recognize that widely traumatic experiences, such as extreme weather and other impacts of the C-E-B crisis, create persistent and ongoing traumatic stressors. Trauma-informed approaches, therefore, are necessary at all levels across the social-ecological model as we work to support our society through these trying times.

*Help Everyone Learn Simple "Presencing" Emotional Self-Regulation and Co-Regulation Resilience Skills*

As people become trauma-informed, the next step is to teach them skills and methods to calm their body, mind, and emotions so they can get unstuck and move out of a high or low zone back into their "Resilience Growth Zone (RGZ)".

It can be helpful to share simple age and culturally-accountable information to help people understand why they feel good and can function well when they remain within their RGZ and why they can be distressed and function poorly when their instinctive Fight-Flight-Freeze reactions are activated. They are pushed out of their RGZ and become frozen in a "high" or "low" zone.

People can then be taught simple ways to notice physical sensations in their body that signify they are stuck in a high or low zone, such as muscle tension and headaches, as well as psychological signs, such as constant ruminating about past or future problems, automatic fear-based reactions to noises or words, and other symptoms of problems.

This is one example of Presencing emotional self-regulation skills, which help people manage disruptive emotions and impulses rather than allowing them to control how they think, feel, and act.

**Presencing "**resourcing" skills help people remember, or rediscover, and utilize their skills, strengths, and resources to deal with a stressful situation. They help people tap into the skills, strengths, and resources they used in the past to overcome adversities and apply them to their present situation. Learning to recognize and manage "thinking distortions," such as catastrophizing and blaming others for the distress one experiences, are other helpful Presencing skills.

**Presencing** "co-regulation" skills are also important. Co-regulation involves interacting with other people to help both parties manage their in-the-moment thoughts and emotions in ways that help calm, rather than agitate, the other's emotions.

***Help Everyone Learn Simple Purposing (or Adversity-Based Growth) Resilience Skills***

**Purposing** adversity-based growth resilience skills are the third element of good mental wellness and resilience literacy. They are vital to help people overcome despair by discovering new sources of meaning, direction, healthy hope, and courage during adversities.

Clarifying and living out one's most important values during adversities is one essential element of Purposing because it puts people in a better place to deal with adversities. Values are life concepts or principles that clarify what is important to us and guide our behavior. This can enhance our self-esteem, build self-confidence, and provide us with a sense of meaning and purpose that can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed by climate adversities.

In sum, finding a purpose in life that involves helping other people or the natural environment is a meaningful way to help oneself.

***How CRNs Can Build Universal Mental Wellness and Resilience Literacy***

*Build Mental Wellness and Resilience Literacy among All CRN Members***.** One of the first steps an CRN can take is to build mental wellness and resilience literacy among the people involved with the steering committee/board and the Resilience Innovation Teams.

*Organize a Mental Wellness Literacy Resilience Innovation Team.* The team should develop strategies that ensure that all adults and youth in the community have the opportunity to increase their literacy about mental wellness and resilience. Handbooks and other materials can be distributed to provide instructions on how to teach these issues. The strategies can include

- *Supporting Existing Adult Mental Wellness and Resilience Literacy Programs*: An CRN should survey the community to identify and support any mental wellness and resilience literacy programs for adults in the community.

- *Supporting Existing Youth Mental Wellness and Resilience Literacy Programs*: An CRN should also identify and support existing youth mental wellness and resilience literacy programs.

- *Educating Community and Grassroots Leaders*: Mental wellness and resilience literacy education programs should also be offered to leaders of civic, non-profit, faith, neighborhood, private, and public organizations.

- *Educating Police, Fire, Emergency Responders, and Health Care Professionals*: All police, fire, emergency responders, health care, and other front-line workers should learn about mental wellness and resilience literacy.

- *Educating K-12 Education, Community College, and University Faculty, Staff, and Students*: Public, non-profit, and private educational institutions of all types, sizes, and locations in the community should be engaged in programs that build mental wellness and resilience literacy among their faculty, staff, and students.

- *Educating the General Public*: A constant stream of educational materials and training workshops should be offered to the general public to increase their mental wellness and resilience literacy.

Checklist
For Building Universal Mental Wellness and Resilience Literacy

| | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did the CRN ensure that everyone in the community became trauma-informed? | | | |
| Did the CRN take steps to ensure that everyone in the community learned simple self-administrative "Presencing" skills? | | | |
| Did the CRN take steps to ensure that everyone in the community learned simple self-administrative "Purposing" skills? | | | |
| Did the CRN scan the community to identify and support existing adult-focused mental wellness and resilience literacy programs? | | | |
| Did the CRN scan the community to identify and support existing youth-focused mental wellness and resilience literacy programs? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and help organize many other age and culturally appropriate methods to build universal literacy about mental wellness and resilience? | | | |

## 4) Foster Engagement in Specific Practices that Enhance and Sustain Mental Wellness and Resilience

As residents engage in activities that establish social connections, refurbish local built/physical, ecological, and economic conditions, and increase their literacy about mental wellness and resilience, they will become more interested in specific practices that can help them remain mentally well and resilient during persistent adversities.

Several different practices boost the capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience. However, research shows that some of the most important include practicing forgiveness, finding simple joys, laughing often, being grateful, continually learning, and caring for the body. CRNs can make education about the importance of these practices a stand-alone focus. They should also integrate engagement in the practices into the other foundational areas they focus on.


Several different practices boost the capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience. However, research shows that some of the most important include practicing forgiveness, finding simple joys, laughing often, being grateful, continually learning, and caring for the body. CRNs can make education about the importance of these practices a stand-alone focus. They should also integrate engagement in the practices into the other foundational areas they focus on.

*Practice Forgiveness*

The need for greater forgiveness will grow as the C-E-B crisis plays out because people will often become furious at individuals and organizations that continue to damage the planet and harm society. In addition, the traumatic stresses generated by the C-E-B crisis will cause many people to say and do offensive or hurtful things to family, friends, or others.

Forgiveness is not about forgetting someone hurt you, downplaying the harm they caused, excusing or letting the perpetrators off the hook, or making up with them. It is about those who were hurt choosing to let go of their resentment and desire for revenge. Practicing forgiveness can release unhealthy anger and resentment. This can lead to healthier relationships and improved mental wellness. It can also lower blood pressure, increase immune functions, and, in other ways, improve your physical health.

Forgiving ourselves will also be vital during the long C-E-B crisis because we are likely to say or do hurtful things. Self-forgiveness involves understanding how traumatic stressors pushed you outside your Resilient Growth Zone, caused you to become stuck in a high or low zone, and led to poor decisions about how to think and act.

It also involves having empathy for yourself because of the situation you found yourself in, developing greater awareness of what is happening within and around you, and striving to act in ways that avoid harm.

**Examples of How CRNs Can Promote Forgiveness in their Community**

- Model Forgiveness During CRN Meetings and Events

- Promote the Enright Model of Forgiveness: One approach an CRN can use to promote forgiveness is the four-phase process developed by Robert Enright.
    - Uncovering phase: seeks to understand the offense and its impact on their life.
    - Decision phase: learns forgiveness and determines if they want to commit to forgiving
    - Work phase: seeks to understand the offender and potential reasons why the offender might have acted hurtfully.
    - Deepening phase: seeks to find a sense of meaning or purpose in their suffering.

- Utilize the REACH approach: REACH is an acronym for Everett Worthington's "REACH Forgiveness," a five-step process that demonstrates that forgiveness involves both a decision to forgive and an emotional transformation for the person who practices it.
    - R = Recall the hurt
    - E = Empathize with your offender
    - A = Make an altruistic gift of forgiveness
    - C = Commit to forgiveness
    - H = Hold onto forgiveness for the long-term

- Employ the Forgive for Good Method: Another approach an CRN can use to engage residents in forgiveness is Frederic Luskin's "Forgive for Good" method. This is a nine-step process in which participants are taught to reframe the experience of victimhood and transform it into a story of resilience.

- Other Resources: The Fetzer Institute offers some excellent tools to help people engage in forgiveness. The International Forgiveness Institute also has good suggestions and examples that CRNs can use. In addition, The Forgiveness Project provides helpful information and tools. And Edward Worthington's report on *The Science of Forgiveness*, written for journalists, offers excellent recommendations.

*Find Simple Joys*

Back in 2015, researchers found that 93 percent of Americans wanted to experience more joy in their daily lives. Like forgiveness, the COVID-19 pandemic is certain to have sustained or increased that number. The constant adversities generated during the long C-E-B crisis will aggravate the lack of joy.

However, research shows that when people take the time to find joy in small things when they are distressed, their nervous system is calmed, blood pressure is reduced, stress is relieved, and more oxygen is released to the brain, which activates the release of endorphins and helps them feel more positive.

**Ways CRNs Can Help Residents Find Simple Joys**

*Take Time to Celebrate Simple Joys***.** During CRN Meetings and Events. CRNs can practice finding simple joys during their meetings and events. This will help participants calm their bodies, minds, and emotions during adversities. As with the other practices described in this chapter, doing so will also provide a model other community members can follow.

*Encourage Residents to Find Simple Joys***.** In Seattle, Washington 2015, a rogue designer painted colorful new crosswalks on several streets. Neighbors loved them; the city made them permanent rather than removing them.

This led to a community crosswalk program, allowing other neighborhoods to create colorful street art. It brought joy to residents, enhanced community pride, and increased pedestrian visibility and safety, all of which enhanced social connections. The simple act spurred cities like Atlanta, Los Angeles, and others to adopt similar programs. CRNs can promote similar types of heartwarming innovations.

*Urge Local Groups and Organizations to Promote Simple Joys***.** CRNs can also urge local groups and organizations to find ways to help their staff, customers, clients, members, and stakeholders find simple joys.

*Include Simple Joys in Community Activities.* CRNs can also work with local governments, schools, and other institutions to make it easy for residents to engage in activities that promote simple joys.

*Laugh Often*

Laughter can also connect people with others, providing the emotional support needed to respond constructively to climate adversities. It is guaranteed to boost morale and build trust when shared with others.

People enjoy coming together with others to innovate and transform local conditions when they feel connected to others they are working with, and laughter can generate these conditions. It can also be a force multiplier that allows people to let their guard down, show who they are, and build trust as they respond to challenging circumstances.

**Ways CRNs Can Help Residents Laugh Often**

*Take Time to Laugh During CRN Meetings and Events.* It will be important for CRN members to laugh continually during all its meetings and events. This will help everyone release

stress and tension during ongoing climate adversities. Finding ways to enable consistent laughter during CRN gatherings when appropriate will help community members see that it is possible to laugh even during tedious meetings and other events.

*Train Community Members to Promote Therapeutic Laughter.* Consider resources from the World Laughing Tour, the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Human, the International Society for Humor, and the Institute for Emotional Learning.

During its efforts to promote laughter, CRNs will want to make it crystal clear that laughter should never occur at the expense of others and that inappropriate forms of humor should never take place because this can diminish the wellness and resilience of both those who are laughed at and those who engage in this demeaning practice.

*Be Grateful*

It will be vital for CRNs to promote the ongoing practice of gratitude to enhance universal capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience during persistent climate hardships. This will bring people into direct positive relationships with others and increase the givers' and the receivers' sense of well-being.

This can also help isolated individuals connect with others in neighborhoods and communities. When this occurs, gratitude can strengthen both "strong" and "weak" social ties. The new trusting connections can unify people and motivate them to work toward the common purpose of enhancing everyone's capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience and help them engage in solutions to the C-E-B crisis.

CRNs can use both examples to design their unique community gratitude campaigns.

***Other Ways CRNs Can Promote Gratitude***

*Practice Gratitude During CRN Meetings and Activities***.** A CRN can promote gratitude during coalition meetings and events as with forgiveness, finding simple joys, and laughing often. Offer a sincere welcome to people when they join the coalition. Whether three or thirty people attend a meeting, they should be openly thanked and shown gratitude for their presence.

*Encourage Personal Gratitude Practices***.** CRNs can also continually promote the personal benefits of practicing gratitude to residents. They can also inform the community that a smile or firm handshake is a form of gratitude and that many people find praying or other forms of devotion the highest form of gratitude. A CRN can also urge people to show appreciation for those in their bonding, bridging, and linking social support networks.

*Appreciate Different Local Cultures.* CRNs can practice gratitude by learning about and appreciating the different cultures in the neighborhood or community. This can be done, for example, by offering culturally appropriate foods at different times of the year during

gatherings and holding rituals and events that reflect the cultural, religious, or spiritual backgrounds of different populations.

*Hold Gratitude Celebrations.* CRNs can embed gratitude within their strategies to build universal mental wellness and transformational resilience by holding regular informal and formal celebrations that give out awards and, in other ways, recognize the efforts of different people, groups, or organizations that have given to the community.

*Organize "Gratitude Circles."* These groups of five to one hundred people or more come together to share gratitude for any other participant in the group they want to appreciate.

### *Keep Learning*

Research has found that learning is good for our brains because it keeps the synapses performing well. Staying curious also helps reduce and manage the symptoms of stress because it leads to a drop in stress-related hormones, a better sense of control and self-efficacy, and reduced anxiety.

It will be essential for everyone to learn how traumatic stresses can affect their body, mind, and emotions, as well as the thinking and behaviors of groups, and how those reactions can be prevented and healed. Most importantly, continued learning will be essential to build a capable, entrepreneurial, empowered, and engaged population in their neighborhood and community to sustain mental wellness and transformational resilience as they engage in activities that help reduce the C-E-B crisis to manageable levels.

### Ways CRNs Can Help Residents Keep Learning

*Model Continual Learning During CRN Meetings and Events***.** One of the most important ways an CRN can promote continual learning is to demonstrate it during coalition meetings and events. Members can share new insights gained through their work or recent conversations with others. They can also describe new perspectives they gained by reading books or documents and how it has altered their thinking or practices. In addition, they can continually acknowledge that they do not know and want to learn new things.

*Raise Public Awareness of the Importance of Continual Learning***.** CRNs can motivate residents to keep learning during the long C-E-B crisis by continually raising public awareness of its importance. This can include the value of listening to people with different perspectives, reading new and interesting books and articles, or looking for new and challenging things. It can also include taking cooking, art, language, computer, or other classes, joining a book or film club, learning to play a musical instrument, or trying a new form of physical activity.

*Connect People Who Want to Learn Similar Things***.** Much like the Edmonton Canada Abundant Community initiative, CRNs can link people with similar interests to allow them to learn from each other. For example, people who might want to learn woodworking can

be connected with others who are interested in this activity and are happy to share what they know.

*Advocate for Equitable Access to Quality Education***.** Another important step CRNs can take is to lobby for equitable access to quality education. This will be essential to prepare everyone for the long C-E-B crisis. It can also promote social justice, peaceful relationships, and ecological restoration. Unfortunately, low-income communities, people of color, migrants, and other marginalized children and adults, as well as people living in rural areas, often do not have access to quality education. CRNs can advocate for universal, free, quality early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education, and higher education to change this. Access to education will enable everyone to contribute to their community constructively, achieve their potential as human beings, and inspire them to engage in solutions to the C-E-B crisis.

*Advocate for Adult and Community Education (ACE).* Equally important, CRNs can promote Adult and Community Education (ACE), called "community learning." This covers a wide range of learning opportunities designed to help people gain new skills, prepare for higher levels of education, return to learning, or develop an interest in new subjects.

Very few public policies are dedicated to (ACE), primarily delivered by voluntary neighborhood and community organizations and continuing education programs. CRNs can lobby public education institutions to offer ACE programs to promote continued learning. They can also urge provincial/state and local/municipal governments to adopt policies that support and fund ACE programs.

### *Care for the Body*

There are many ways to enhance physical health. For example, getting the right sleep and consuming moderate amounts of alcohol are important. However, two actions that will be particularly helpful during the long C-E-B crisis are regular exercise and eating healthy food.

Both will become more problematic as cascading disruptions to essential systems and acute disasters accelerate. CRNs should emphasize the importance during the C-E-B crisis.

#### Ways CRNs Can Motivate Residents to Care for Their Body

*Promote Regular Physical Activity.* Research indicates that even modest physical activity can help improve mental and physical health.

*Promote Access to Healthy Eating and Healthy Foods.* Having access to healthy food and healthy eating is often difficult for low-income communities and people of color. The cascading disruptions to essential systems and acute disasters generated by the C-E-B crisis will often aggravate these problems by creating more food insecurity. This is why CRNs must make this a priority.

*Practice Movement and Health Eating During CRN Meetings and Events.* Every CRN should be a role model for caring for physical health by engaging members in physical activity and eating healthy foods during all coalition meetings and events. Breaks should be taken during meetings to allow people to get up and move around. Fast foods should be avoided, and organically-grown fresh fruits and vegetables should be provided as snacks and meals.

*Promote a Variety of Physical Activities.* To help people stay physically active during adversities, CRNs can urge residents to set goals and establish routines that can include regular running, fast or slow walking, stretching, sports and games, strength training, swimming, exercise classes, water aerobics, yoga, Pilates, dancing, bowling, bocce ball, gardening, bicycling, play with grandchildren (for older adults), and other forms of physical movement.

*Create "Walksheds."* CRNs can urge residents to create their own "walksheds." This involves measuring and drawing a two-mile radius map around a residence that provides an easy thirty to forty-minute walk. Most people can walk two miles in about forty minutes and, in addition to getting good exercise, by regularly following their walkshed, they are likely to meet new people, discover local amenities, and support local businesses.

*Promote Bike Sharing.* CRNs can support bike sharing, and if they live near a stream or lake, "paddle sharing." In the U.S. city of Minneapolis, for example, a paddle share system lets commuters travel down the Mississippi River between two stations on the river. The system connects people with the city bike share system, which allows commuters access to both modes of transportation.

*Create Mobile Produce Markets and Healthy Local Food Stores.* As previously mentioned, many low-income neighborhoods where BIPOC communities live are food deserts. CRNs can change this by using the approach developed by the Fresh Moves Project to help these neighborhoods access the same farmer's market produce found in other parts of a city. CRNs can also partner with local farmers and other organizations to provide funding, training, and resources to help existing store owners stock and promote healthy foods and recruit the development of new health food stores.

*Establish Climate Resilient Food Banks and Pantries.* Following the above, CRNs can also bring local farmers, non-profit, and public organizations together to provide fresh, healthy food for community members and educate them about diet and nutrition.

*Support Farm-to-School Programs.* These can range from buying food from local farmers to serve at schools, farm field trips, hands-on learning in a garden, cooking demonstrations, and integration of food-related information into classroom curricula.

*Promote Community-Supported Agriculture and Farmers Markets.* CRNs can promote CSAs, often called, that provide members with a box or a share of the fresh food they produce and harvest weekly. Farmers markets are locations in communities where local farmers can sell the food they produce. CSAs and Farmers Markets can increase access to fresh, healthy foods, support local farmers, and keep food dollars circulating in the local economy.

*Tap into the Approaches Offered by Common Threads, Fresh Roots, and Slow Food International***.** Common Threads provides cooking and nutrition programs to underserved communities across the U.S. They take a hands-on, family-centered approach to education on nutrition, healthy eating, sustainability, and garden development. Fresh Roots, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, cultivates school gardens and provides food education at schools across Vancouver. They also turn school gardens into educational sites, mentor youth at garden clubs and summer programs, and empower students to grow their food. Slow Food International works in more than 160 countries to help people access good, clean, and fair food. They are also focused on combatting the environmental consequences of our food choices.

*Utilize the Expertise Offered by Healthy Places by Design, the Center for Advancing Health Communities, and America Walks.* Healthy Places by Design partners with communities to design place-based strategies to ensure health and well-being for all. The Center for Advancing Healthy Communities "provides technical assistance and training for program implementation while expanding capabilities and resources, promoting healthful policy and environmental change, and collaborating to foster mutually beneficial partnerships." America Walks offers training and technical assistance programs to help communities "create safe, accessible, equitable, and enjoyable places to walk and move."

**CRNs Should Establish Healthy Practices Resilience Innovation Teams**

To motivate residents to engage in the practices described in this section that help enhance their mental wellness and transformational resilience, CRNs can establish a Healthy Practices Resilience Innovation Team composed of residents, and civic, non-profit, private, and public organizations. The team should continually innovate to develop new ways to engage residents in each of the six practices.

Checklist

For motivating residents to engage in practices that enhance mental wellness and transformational resilience.

| | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to practice forgiveness? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to find simple joys? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to laugh often? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to be grateful? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to keep learning? | | | |
| Did the CRN investigate and implement simple ways to motivate residents to care for physical health? | | | |

## 5) Establish Ongoing Opportunities for Residents to Heal Their Distresses and Traumas

*Engagement in the Other Four Areas Will Often Foster Self-Healing*

As previously stated, the long C-E-B crisis is certain to cause millions of people to experience anxiety, depression, anger, grief, hopelessness, and other distressing emotions. However, for most people, these feelings will not be symptoms of psychopathology. They will be normal reactions to dysfunctional and often frightening external conditions. Again, rather than pathologizing people, it will be important for CRNs to help everyone understand that the distress they feel is perfectly natural, given the state of the world.


Helping people engage in the other four foundational areas of enhancing universal capacity for mental wellness and transformational resilience will enable many to heal themselves--that is, become whole again. Healing can often be difficult because distressed and traumatized people fail to understand what they are experiencing or how to deal with it. Often, they can only attend to their basic needs, such as finding shelter or putting food on the table. This is why CRNs must take the lead in organizing ongoing healing opportunities. Ruben Cantu from the Prevention Institute said, "It only takes one person or group to recognize the need for people to heal, and they are usually leaders of their community.

*Healing Circles and Other Group and Community-based Therapeutic Methods*

Healing circles are widely used today to support people with cancer, those who have lost loved ones, and individuals who have experienced racism or been subjected to many other systemic oppressions. An important element of healing circles is the focus on strength-based dialogues that enable people to identify the assets and resources that enable them to survive a harmful ordeal. They also emphasize community-building in a shared environment, which creates solidarity, collective healing, and the proliferation of resilience.

*Other Forms of Healing Opportunities*

CRNs will also need to help establish therapeutic art, theater, written dialogues, journaling, drawings, different forms of mindfulness, connecting with nature, and other healing methods. The approaches an CRN pursues should be shaped by the age, demographic, and cultural make-up of the neighborhoods and communities they are engaged with.

*The Therapeutic Importance of Memorial Events and Rituals*

In addition to direct healing opportunities, when communities are traumatized by climate-related events, it will also be therapeutic for residents to come together to hold public rituals and ceremonies that memorialize what happened and honor those who were injured, lost, or seriously affected. These events often happen spontaneously when people gather for vigils, including placing pictures, cards, or flowers in symbolic locations. Planning other types of memorial events will ensure people throughout the community are aware of them and can attend.

Memorial ceremonies will also be important to keep the adversities alive in the public eye, highlight the need to support the survivors, and pressure elected officials, business leaders, and others to adopt practices and policies that reduce the C-E-B crisis to acceptable levels. Community rituals and memorial events can also serve as a venue for victims to demand justice from perpetrators and seek redress. They can be a powerful way to help people learn lessons from what occurred and take collective action to prevent future traumas and improve local conditions.

## Ways CRNs Can Establish Ongoing Healing Opportunities

*Model Healing Practices During CRN Meetings and Activities.* Many members of the CRN board/steering committee and Resilience Innovation Teams are certain to be distressed, and others will be traumatized as the C-E-B crisis worsens. In addition to encouraging them to participate in formal healing events, simple healing practices can occur during meetings and events.

*Organize Trauma Healing Resilience Innovation Teams.* CRNs can also form a Trauma Healing Resilience Innovation Team composed of neighborhood groups, volunteer organizations, and faith-based, non-profit, private, and public organizations to plan and organize a wide range of ongoing age and culturally accountable opportunities for residents to heal their trauma. The Innovation Teams should organize affordable, easy-to-reach healing gatherings for every population and sector of the community.

*Organize Somatic, Mindfulness, Art, Music, Writing, Dance/Movement, Drama, and other Therapeutic Opportunities.* CRNs should consider many types of healing opportunities that focus on somatic skills such as body scan, tracking, grounding, shaking, and dancing; mindfulness skills such as soft-belly breathing, six-second breathing, guided meditation, and mindful eating, and walking; cognitive skills such as awareness of thinking distortions, guided imagery, dialogues with symptoms, and meetings with the wiser self; and other healing techniques.

*Engage Residents in Nature-based Healing.* Also called ecotherapy, this is an umbrella term for the practice of being in nature to promote healing. Different types of nature-based healing programs include exercising outside green spaces, wilderness therapy, animal-

assisted therapy, using natural materials for arts and crafts, therapeutic farming, and therapeutic horticulture.

*Organize Peer-to-Peer Training and Peer-Based Healing Opportunities.* Peer-to-peer healing programs will be an important way for a CRN to help residents normalize their stress reactions, reduce stigma and other barriers to engagement, and increase the social connections needed to heal the traumas they experience during the C-E-B crisis.

*Organize Trauma Healing Hubs***.** Although most of the existing resilience hubs offer services delivered by local agencies and institutions and thus have a top-down emphasis, CRNs can establish grassroots organized "Trauma Healing Hubs" that offer residents ongoing age and culturally accountable opportunities to connect with neighbors and engage in practices that heal their suffering.

*Organize Memorial Events and Rituals*. Memorial events that are initiated and led by residents are typically most beneficial to survivors, which is why an CRN should play a key role in organizing and supporting them.

Checklist

For establishing ongoing opportunities for residents to heal climate traumas

| | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did the CRN support the efforts of residents to self-heal their distresses and traumas? | | | |
| Did the CRN consider establishing different age types and culturally accountable healing circles? | | | |
| Did the CRN consider establishing age and culturally accountable somatic, art, writing, mindfulness, movement-based, nature-based, and other healing options? | | | |
| Did the CRN establish innovative therapeutic opportunities like therapeutic horticulture? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop a strategy to support memorial events and rituals that emerge spontaneously in the community during or after an emergency? | | | |
| Did the CRN develop a strategy to hold a regular series of memorial events and rituals to commemorate previous disasters and emergencies? | | | |

## III. Conclusion

The five foundation protective factors described in this Handbook should be the cornerstones of the strategies CRNs develop to build universal mental wellness and resilience for the C-E-B crisis in their neighborhood or community.

It is important to remember that all of the protective factors are interactive. Strategies to engage residents in strengthening one of the protective factors can often simultaneously strengthen others. For example, when engaging residents in activities that conserve and regenerate local ecological systems, a major focus can also be placed on helping participants get to know each other and building social connections. When engaging in the work they can also learn simple Presencing and Purposing resilience skills to build meaning, purpose, and hope.

One other important point CRN members should remember is that the protective factors described in this Handbook are not the only ones they can focus on. Each neighborhood and community is likely to identify other protective factors that are unique to their demographics, culture, or religious or spiritual grounding. No matter what other types of assets and resources CRNs focus on, we encourage them to make sure that, in some way, the five foundation protective factors described in the handbook are addressed.

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