

RESEARCH BRIEF

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CO-DEVELOPING THEORIES OF CHANGE FOR IMPROVED COMMUNITY-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION EVALUATION

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BACKGROUND

Community-based violence intervention (CVI) programs are considered important strategies to prevent community violence and promote health and safety. However, many evaluations of CVI programs have had mixed or inconclusive results. Prior CVI evaluations have focused on *deficit-based* outcomes like crime rather than *asset-based* outcomes like improvements in behavioral health, strengthening of prosocial relationships, and feelings of safety and security. This evaluation approach is inconsistent with the core of CVI, which is about community strengths and the promotion of peace, safety, and healing.

These mixed findings for CVI program evaluations may be due to a disconnect between CVI programs' **theories of change** (TOC) and the measures used to evaluate programs, which often fail to capture important incremental improvements in health and wellbeing that are on the pathway to violence reduction.

GOAL

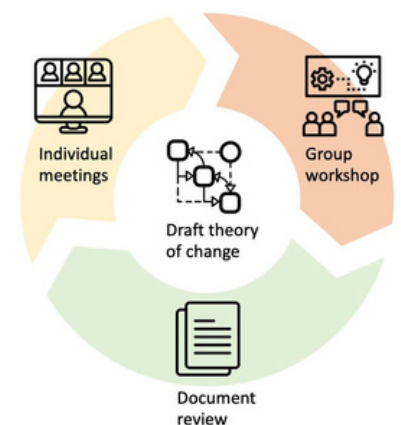
Community members and researchers co-developed a TOC for community-based youth firearm violence intervention and prevention programs in Washington state.

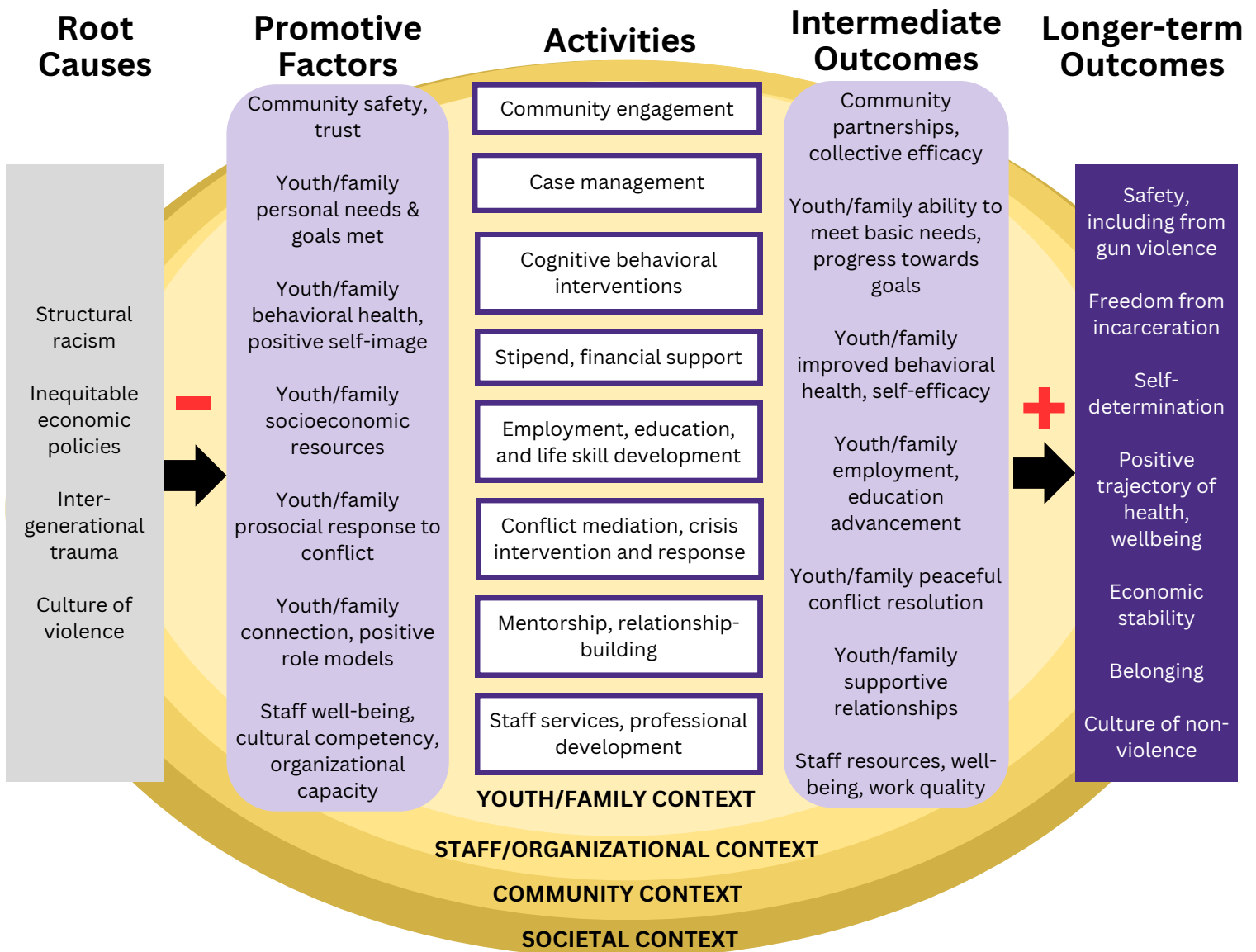
TOCs are communication tools that visually show how and why a program or intervention is thought to work. They **guide program evaluation** and **support dissemination and scale up**.

APPROACH

To co-develop TOCs, we followed a multi-step process involving:

1. Researcher review of CVI program documentation
2. Individual meetings between CVI program leaders and researchers
3. A day-long workshop to support collective learning and progress towards equitable and community-led evaluation





Historical time

ROOT CAUSES:	PROMOTIVE FACTORS:	ACTIVITIES:	INTERMEDIATE AND LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES:
Social and structural drivers of community violence	Assets and resources that promote health and safety	Program supports and services provided	Changes among youth, their families, staff, and the community resulting from activities within 6 months- 1 year (intermediate) and 1-2 years+ (longer-term)

IMPLICATIONS

01 In addition to identifying program activities and goals, the TOC situated CVI programs in historical time and across multi-level context. This helps contextualize the problem and solution to community violence, align expectations, and improve the quality of evaluations.

02 The theory of change we co-developed provides a common lens to conceptualize, compare, and evaluate CVI programs in Washington state and may support more rigorous and equity-centered evaluations.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, REFER TO:

Schleimer JP, Lyons V, Smith D, et al. Co-Developing Theories of Change for Improved Community-Based Violence Intervention Evaluation. *J Trauma and Acute Care Surg.* 2024; doi: 10.1097/TA.0000000000004277.

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