

Together for Resilient Youth (TRY) Coalition Summary

MARCH 2025-MAY2025

OVERALL APPROACH: TRAUMA-INFORMED COMMUNITY HEALING

Core Philosophy: TRY Coalition recognizes trauma as the root challenge from which other community challenges flow - including violence, substance use, mental health crises, and systemic inequities. By addressing trauma through community-centered processes, meaningful civic participation, and policy maker accountability, TRY builds sustainable community power and resilience that prevents and heals the cascading effects of unaddressed trauma.

Community Empowerment Model The Roots, Restoration, and Resilience (RRR) approach centers policy development within community-led initiatives that advance equitable pathways to systemic change. This model builds people's skills, confidence, and sense of personal and collective power while enhancing trust, social cohesion, and community understanding of their combined strength. The approach facilitates necessary policy changes to implement structural interventions while ensuring community outcomes are based on co-led communities building and channeling their power effectively.

Communities develop skills, confidence, trust, social cohesion, and a clear sense of both individual and combined power, making them more likely to develop, sustain, and grow organized advocacy bases. The community acts together through equitable structures to set meaningful agendas, shift public discourse, influence decision-making processes, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with policy makers.

Ambassador Mission: Every community member has the power to save lives through trauma-informed care, peer support, crisis intervention, and collective action for systemic change that addresses the root trauma underlying community challenges.

SUBSTANCE USE & OVERDOSE PREVENTION

Opioid Response TRY Coalition has developed comprehensive responses to the opioid epidemic by identifying alternatives to prescription medications for pain management and creating targeted talking points that address the impact across all age groups from K-12 students to seniors. The coalition focuses on both risk assessment and prevention strategies while implementing youth community overdose prevention education programs. Central to this work is the distribution and education around naloxone, ensuring community members have access to this life-saving medication.

Youth Substance Use The coalition has strategically responded to emerging trends in youth substance use, particularly addressing the rise in vaping and marijuana use while noting the positive decline in other substances. Through mentored step-down approaches and comprehensive health education, TRY provides young people with factual information about substance use risks and connects them to appropriate support services.

Alcohol Intervention TRY addresses high-risk alcohol consumption across all age groups through comprehensive education and community-based interventions. The Good Neighbor Business Network utilizes geo-mapping technology to identify problematic purchase patterns and density issues that contribute to community health challenges. The coalition has developed specific community talking points addressing alcohol-attributable deaths and tracks concerning disparities in chronic death rates between white and Black residents. Prescription drugs taken with alcohol was found to be a root cause for overdoses among Black residents.

"YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE LIVES" - VITAL STRATEGIES INITIATIVE

Naloxone Access & Distribution The campaign focuses on dramatically expanding access to naloxone nasal spray as a critical tool for reversing opioid overdoses. This initiative specifically addresses the disproportionately high overdose death rates in Black communities, recognizing how systemic inequities have created these devastating disparities. Health ambassadors play a central role in distributing naloxone and providing comprehensive usage training throughout the community.

Addressing Systemic Inequities TRY's work with this initiative directly confronts health disparities by targeting communities most severely impacted by the overdose crisis. The coalition empowers community leaders to take meaningful action while creating healthier, safer environments designed to prevent unnecessary

deaths. Cultural responsiveness remains central to addressing barriers that have historically prevented naloxone access in marginalized communities.

TRY Coalition Integration The Vital Strategies initiative seamlessly integrates with TRY's broader work through youth education about overdose risks and naloxone administration. Adult health ambassadors lead community-wide naloxone distribution events while utilizing overdose data to identify high-need areas for strategic naloxone placement. This work connects directly to the "Coping Together" family programs, ensuring comprehensive support for families affected by substance use.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION & SAFETY

Violence Response TRY Coalition takes a data-driven approach to violence prevention by analyzing comprehensive information about where and why violence occurs in the community. The coalition shares this critical data with community members and develops actionable response plans that address root causes. By mapping the trajectory from bullying through interpersonal and dating violence to elder abuse, TRY provides a comprehensive understanding of how violence evolves across the lifespan. Geographic mapping reveals important patterns in crime types, timing, and demographics that inform targeted prevention strategies.

Gun Violence (HEAL Program & Community Response) TRY was selected to participate in the HEAL NCDHHS program, representing MAHEC in NC Region 4 to lead a collaborative team of Community Based Organizations with Community Health Workers. This partnership focuses on co-developing and implementing community-centered strategies that address violence as a legitimate public health crisis. The work emphasizes civic participation and holds policy makers accountable for supporting community-driven solutions.

Community meetings address understanding collective trauma from gun violence, exploring ACEs and building community resilience through trauma-informed responses. Presentations examine the deep connections between trauma and gun violence while addressing mental health impacts on entire communities. Youth perspectives and experiences guide prevention strategies specifically designed for young people. Partnership with Project Safe Neighborhoods provides program overview and community-specific approaches along with ongoing partnership opportunities. Critical attention to secondary trauma prevention includes practical self-care strategies for community members. The "Change Your Words, Change Your World" initiative transforms communication and empowers youth voice.

Justice-Involved Community Support Health ambassadors recognize that many community members with justice involvement have high ACEs scores and approach them without stigma or judgment. They create safe spaces where people can process both their own trauma and their impact on others, fostering genuine accountability within supportive frameworks rather than through punishment or isolation. The approach addresses collective trauma from gun violence affecting entire communities while building lasting resilience through comprehensive trauma-informed responses.

Community Trauma Impact TRY addresses widespread feelings of helplessness and the perception that nothing can be done to prevent gun violence. The coalition counters the negative effects of repeated media exposure that intensifies fear and community trauma. By providing meaningful alternatives to isolation and despair through collective action, TRY builds genuine community capacity to both respond to and prevent gun violence trauma.

Youth Safety Concerns Young people have identified specific needs including improved school security and more serious responses to school threats. They advocate for changing perceptions and culture around guns while expressing the need to feel safe around the people who are supposed to protect them. Youth voices emphasize the importance of authentic safety measures that address their real concerns.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT

LIFT Coalition (Ages 9-17, 18-24) The LIFT Coalition directly addresses critical mental health challenges including ruminations, cutting, and self-harm among young people. The program builds genuine resilience and essential life skills using proven peer-to-peer techniques that recognize young people as experts in their own experiences. Youth create powerful content including spoken word, music, art, dance, and video that speaks to their lived experiences. The coalition specifically addresses suicide prevention among Black middle and high school students, providing immediate access to crisis hotlines and treatment referrals.

Change Your Words, Change Your World (16+) This transformative youth empowerment program focuses on developing communication skills and self-advocacy abilities. Participants learn how language shapes reality and develop tools for positive personal and community transformation.

Youth Voices on Education Young people consistently request more intentional and meaningful work instead of assignments that feel like busy work. They advocate for increased catch-up time during the school day and comprehensive rethinking of educational approaches. Students express strong interest in skills-based learning opportunities including carpentry and professional certifications. They envision wellness days that strengthen bonds between administration and students while creating more supportive school environments.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Family Mental Health The "Coping Together" program represents an innovative approach originally developed in Kenya and successfully adapted for Durham, NC, achieving a remarkable 100% success rate. This family-centered intervention focuses on building genuine family connectedness and providing tools for collective healing and resilience.

HEALTH AMBASSADOR NETWORK

Youth Health Ambassadors Youth health ambassadors provide essential peer-to-peer leadership throughout LIFT Coalition programming, serving young people from ages 9-17 and 18-24. They develop and share creative expression through spoken word, music, art, dance, and video content that speaks directly to their communities' experiences. These young leaders actively advocate for safety improvements including gun safety measures, enhanced school security, and environments where they can express their authentic selves. Youth ambassadors teach community members about overdose prevention and naloxone administration while advocating for meaningful educational reforms including skills-based learning and comprehensive wellness approaches.

Adult Health Ambassadors Adult health ambassadors serve as essential community conveners, facilitating geo-mapping sessions and community data sharing that inform strategic decision-making. They lead policy advocacy through RRR (Roots, Restoration, Resilience) initiatives while implementing "Coping Together" family programs that strengthen community bonds. These ambassadors coordinate the Good Neighbor Business Network to address alcohol density issues and provide comprehensive training in suicide prevention and overdose response. Their work ensures crisis response capabilities are embedded throughout the community.

RESEARCH & DATA INITIATIVES

Mapping & Analysis TRY Coalition utilizes comprehensive geo-mapping for violence prevention, substance use pattern analysis, and business density assessments that inform community interventions. Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data analysis reveals critical information including concerning findings about gun access, with young people reporting they can "get hands on a gun in 10 minutes." Crime pattern analysis examines timing, location, and demographic factors to develop targeted prevention strategies.

Community Health Disparities The coalition tracks alcohol-related deaths by race, revealing important patterns in chronic disease death rates between different community populations. Comprehensive violence impact assessments inform both immediate responses and long-term prevention strategies.