

# **CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES**

**AzAEYC Virtual Community Town Hall**

**August 27, 2020 – Online via Zoom**

## **COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Several elements must come together to make a community healthy and vibrant. Robust educational and economic opportunities are especially important because they serve as “conduits” for other important elements.

With respect to educational opportunity, our community benefits from a shared understanding that our children deserve to grow up in healthy, vibrant communities. In that regard, multiple stakeholders are focused on the well-being of our children. Early childhood educators are deeply committed despite the many challenges facing their profession. We have a strong infrastructure in place, and know what we need to do to support young children, including to help them deal with trauma. More work needs to be done, however, to improve coordination among stakeholders, make our policies more cohesive, and optimize our financial and other resources to have greater impact.

Our community is strengthened by our commitment to each other, resiliency, and cultural cohesion. We also have good resources in the areas of transportation and parks and recreation, but there are inequities in those systems, and in other areas, that must be addressed to make our community healthier and more vibrant.

## **CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES**

Poverty, systemic racism, and other pervasive disparities must be addressed to make the critical elements of healthy, vibrant communities accessible to everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on these disparities, and the fact that they are the root cause of many of the other problems facing our communities. COVID-19 has also created additional trauma for our vulnerable populations, including our children, who are being deprived of critical developmental experiences.

To the extent that the pandemic has brought stark clarity to these systemic issues, we need to use that clarity as a turning point to improve the overall health of our communities. For example, we have become much more aware of our interdependence regardless of socio-economic status. Educators and childcare providers are now widely acknowledged to be “essential workers.” Finally, we better understand the interrelationships between the various elements of healthy, vibrant communities.

## **TAKING ACTION**

Several important actions need to be taken to make our community healthier and more vibrant.

- As individuals, we need to:
  - recognize our own privilege, and how our circumstances may be different from the challenges faced by others;
  - make a commitment to listen to and understand each other;
  - educate ourselves about – and speak out on – systemic racism, social justice, economic inequality, and other issues affecting the health of our communities; and
  - be informed voters.
- As a community, we need to:
  - consider the educational needs of our children at all levels, and how we can provide appropriate opportunities to meet those needs even during the COVID-19 pandemic;

- enhance our data collection and analytics systems, which will equip us to improve educational opportunities and other elements of healthy communities;
- focus on our interdependence and the resulting imperative to support each other;
- make voting as accessible as possible; and
- provide a “safe space” for community members to speak out on issues affecting the health of our communities.

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the AzAEYC Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

***I WILL...***

- Stand beside and speak out against racial and social injustice and stand back when necessary to amplify and elevate the voices of underrepresented community members.
- Work to make sure that once the Pandemic is over that we don't 'cover up' the things revealed during this period...and return to 'normal', forgetting about the great inequities we see.
- Commit to ensuring the voice of those impacted most by decision making is amplified and a key component of the process.