

What is the Stoneleigh Foundation?

Stoneleigh was created by John and Chara Haas. They set up Stoneleigh to be an operating foundation that would only provide fellowship grants to advance system reforms that would lead to improved incomes for children and youth in, or at risk of involvement in, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Last spring our board elected to add the assorted issues that connect to youths impacted by violence.

How did Stoneleigh first get involved with youth violence?

Dr. Ted Corbin runs the Healing Hurt People program at Hahnemann and St. Christopher's hospitals and his fellowship was really our first attempt to address this issue. He established a process to intervene in the cycle of violence that demonstrated the cycle from victimization to perpetration and the awareness that when people survive intentional violence, there is an opening to get them to reconsider and to prevent retaliation and re-injury. Around 40 percent of victims, who live, within five years are re-injured or retaliate. So if you can intervene at that point and provide services that they need, [from] an ID card to behavioral health services, it prevents increased violence.

What else is Stoneleigh working on now?

We also have worked with the city. When Philadelphia was designated a National Forum for Youth Violence Prevention city — which is one of ten cities in the country that the Department of Justice designated — we offered to provide a single point of focus for that effort.

The city, under that designation, is required to create a strategy. We are very intentional about cross-system solutions so where there is a problem that multiple city agencies and departments need to be involved with — and they recognize that no one of them can own it — Stoneleigh will provide a person and their salary to advance that work in an independent and objective way. So we have [Richard Greenwald] in the mayor's office helping to usher through the city's strategy.

Not long after [the Inquirer's Assault on Learning series] the chairman of the [city's School Reform Commission] came to us and asked us for help. He said "we need somebody to create a strategy for us that is everything from what program options there are to how we will collect information." So, Jody Greenblatt is also a fellow and she is based in the school district at the SRC.

What impact does a lack of youth safety have?

When a child is repeatedly crossing yellow tape or walking around blood-stained streets or not safe in their home, all kinds of things happen to them. Children will close down, they will be constantly looking over their shoulders in fear of what might happen next and they can't sit in school. They can't respond and they will feel like they can't do it anymore and so they'll drop out and fall into a pipeline that they don't deserve to be in.

That's when the options to move somebody into systems that they don't necessarily belong in happens and their lives go awry. And it's not the teacher's fault when they don't know that there's an option or they don't know to recognize the signs of trauma or toxic stress. They're not equipped to [find] the appropriate intervention for that child. Too many of our kids are falling into that pipeline and there is just too much that is known at this point not to more appropriately address those impacts from trauma.

What's the biggest barrier to youth safety in Philadelphia?

The biggest challenge is the inability to share data. While the police department has a really spectacular data and technology capability, very few other systems have that. So there's a capacity issue and there's also an ability to share information issue. How they communicate with each other is limited by how they collect the data and privacy regulations. It's really hard to get data from the school district; they have the data but [the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] somewhat limits what they can provide. I would argue that that has been addressed by the federal government and it hasn't quite filtered down here. But just figuring out who in the schools might need mental health services is very hard.

What are some other barriers?

The silos of funding. I am not a person who suggests that we are going to break down silos. We're not. You'd have to change the whole federal government structure to break down silos. But what we can do — and what we are very intentional about — is building bridges between the silos. How can we get a streets department that has this interesting workforce intern program — for what are commonly called opportunity youths — to connect to the commerce department which may have linkages to small businesses? How we get the different departments to talk to each other is an overall challenge.

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Another big challenge is that these are multigenerational problems. I was an assistant to the mayor in 1985 for five years and it is the same communities that are having the same problems and the same levels of violence that I saw back then. We are now in multiple generations of a culture of violence and how you break through that culture of violence is a challenge. We have to understand that these youths live in families and communities where this is a way of life. How we change that norm is a challenge.

There are challenges around education and employment. How do you create ladders of employment opportunities and get youths into entry level jobs and meet the needs of the employers? The challenge of bringing a business community into this issue is enormous but connections between education and employment are key to solving the violence issue.

There [also] aren't a lot of funders in this community who are focused on this issue. Safety is your number one civil right. If kids aren't safe then what difference does it make if you're providing an exceptional education program or if you're doing community development work? If they don't feel safe, none of the rest of that's going to work.

Where do you see gaps in services?

There have been really interesting things that have been discovered in the strategy that the city has developed. One is that there was no school-based Head Start program in the 22nd police district. The city is opting to focus on the 22nd police district to test its various theories rather than doing something city-wide, which is very difficult to do. You're talking about a community that is significantly in need of some support. You're not going to have a school-ready kindergarten class if you have no expectations that these youths should be going to some sort of preschool. That's a problem.

What are some of the strategies being used today?

I think that Philadelphia is somewhat ahead of the national conversation on trauma and trauma-informed practice. We are lucky to have Sandy Bloom who was a co-founder of the sanctuary model which addresses systems serving traumatized youth so that the systems themselves become trauma-informed and supported. If you see [trauma] over and over again and you are dealing with really harmed and hurt people, you become harmed and hurt. Commissioner [Anne Marie] Ambrose [of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services] is training all of her new social workers in trauma-informed practice so they understand that the youth they're dealing with are likely traumatized.

There are social and emotional learning programs that have really taken hold in Chicago that another one of our fellows is trying to get broadly adopted here. The schools adopt this method of working with the students so they develop social and emotional intelligence. In Chicago, through a randomized control trial, they demonstrated that there were 30 percent fewer incidents. These are programs that are generally operated in the elementary and middle schools where it's important to first address these issues. When you have programs that are presenting those kinds of outcomes, that's really significant, particularly in a school district like Philadelphia which has a lot of incidents.

What's working?

I actually think that [the city's] Youth Violence Prevention Collaborative has begun to have some success already and that people are already making some connections that weren't made before.

The U.S. Attorney offered to support a football team at Strawberry Mansion High School — again, 22nd district. There hadn't been one in years and there's a lot of research about how important sports are for young men of that age group. The day before the first game, the U.S. Attorney's office got a call saying they wouldn't be able to play because none of these kids had had health exams. The U.S. Attorney's office reached out to several people in the collaborative and within hours, eight doctors showed up at Strawberry Mansion High School and all the kids got their medical exams and the game went on.

Early on we had sessions with youth who had been justice-involved and one of the things the 18-to-24-year-olds said is "there's no where we can go. We're not allowed in the rec department facilities; we're not allowed on the playgrounds; we have no access to anything except hanging out on the street corners." [Philadelphia's recreation commissioner,] Sue Slawson, quickly provided access for those older youths to go into a rec center at an appropriate time and she helped connect them to jobs. Again, if it wasn't because of the collaborative, she many never have known about that because it's just not something that would have naturally fallen on her radar screen. The awareness and the connections are beginning to be built.

What are Stoneleigh's long-term goals?

Stoneleigh's goal for Greenwald's fellowship is that it is sustained beyond this administration. So often one mayor does something and the next mayor tosses it out. Violence isn't political; it is something that has endured and if something is working well, the next administration needs to pick it up. It took us so long to get to the place where we are now. There is a challenge of how to create enough momentum and have it so embedded that the community demands it of the next mayor.

We [also] need to be looking at well-being and not just be measuring things like recidivism in the juvenile justice system. That's not the final outcome. The final outcome is: how well are these kids? How adaptive are they to difficult situations? How well can they make decisions? How much are they able to deal with disagreement and challenging situations? Stoneleigh's goal is to try to help funders align their work with our work. It doesn't have to be what we're doing, the way we're doing it. If you are an after-school arts program and a kid can't feel

safe walking to that program, you've got a problem with your program.

How you interact with the community violence issue is important. If we can all align our work toward common standards and things that we're all looking for, it will make Philadelphia a better place. [In] Boston, there are 62 different funders that are aligned in a very simple violence collaborative that is supportive of the mayor's plan. Again, they're not all doing the same thing. They're all doing what their particular foundation might be focused on but there's a commonality of outcomes that they're looking for and a commonality of standards that they're adhering to and there's a degree of capacity development that they're making sure that their grantees have.

Any final words?

One of the first things [Corbin] said to me when he applied for our fellowship has stuck with me: "Our children are dying and we can stop it." And we can stop it; we just have to have the will. We have to believe that some kids aren't throw away kids. They're all our children and they have a right to safety no matter what zip code they were born into or what kind of dysfunction they were born into. We as a community and a society have that obligation to keep them safe.