

The National Evaluation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Urban Health Initiative

The Urban Health Initiative was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to improve the health and safety of children and youth in distressed American cities over a ten-year period. Beginning in 1996, eight cities were funded for a two-year planning process; in 1998, Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Philadelphia and Richmond were funded to implement their plans over the next eight years. Each city was challenged to make measurable change in youth health and safety outcomes by using a multi-sector, data driven process to identify problems, strategies and solutions. Program and evaluation costs to the Foundation exceeded \$80 million.

Researchers at NYU, led by principal investigator Beth Weitzman and project director Diana Silver, were funded to design and carry out a national evaluation of the initiative. The National Evaluation integrated a theory of change approach with a quasi-experimental design to address the following evaluation questions:

- To what extent, and in what ways, can a foundation-sponsored initiative serve as a catalyst for a cross-sector, collaborative process?
- To what extent, and in what ways, can a collaborative process result in meaningful changes in policies and programs designed to serve children and youth in urban settings?
- To what extent do these changes in policies and programs improve the health and safety of children and youth in urban settings?

The evaluation was conducted using five different methods: site visits; key informant interviews with leaders of civic organizations, philanthropy and government; analysis of public expenditures on children from the city, state and federal government; a telephone household survey of adults and youth (SAY) conducted three times over the course of the Initiative; and an analysis of administrative data from schools, vital statistics, hospital admissions and the FBI's uniform crime reports from 1992 through 2006. Data from nine comparison cities were also gathered.

As a result of the evaluation, a great deal has been learned about the health and safety needs of America's children and youth, as well as about the process of making systemic change to address them. We are committed to sharing what we have learned through the evaluation of the Urban Health Initiative through our writing, conference presentations, and further research. Further, the SAY is now being made available as a public use data file.

Publications

Diana Silver, Martha Holleman, Tod Mijanovich, Beth C. Weitzman (in press) How Mobility Matters for Place-Based Health Interventions *American Journal of Health Promotion*

Diana Silver, Tod Mijanovich, Jenny Uyei, Farzana Kapadia, Beth C. Weitzman (2011), Lifting Boats Not Closing Gaps: Child Health Outcomes in Distressed Cities 1992-2002 *American Journal of Public Health* 101(2) 278-84.

Tod Mijanovich Beth C. Weitzman (2010) Disaster in Context: The Effects of 9/11 on Youth Distant from the Attacks *Community Mental Health Journal* 46(6) 601-11.

Charles Brecher, Caitlyn Brazill, Beth C. Weitzman, Diana Silver (2010) Understanding the Political Context of "New" Policy Issues: The Use of the Advocacy Coalition Framework in the Case of Expanded After-School Programs *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (20) 335-355.

Beth C. Weitzman, Tod Mijanovich, Diana Silver, Charles Brecher (2009) Finding the Impact in a Messy Intervention: Using an Integrated Design to Evaluate a Comprehensive Citywide Health Initiative. *American Journal of Evaluation* 30(4) 495-514.

Stephanie Bernell, Tod Mijanovich, Beth C. Weitzman (2009). Does the Racial Composition of the School Environment Influence Children's Body Mass Index? *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45(1) 40-46.

Diana Silver, Beth C. Weitzman, (2009) The Pros and Cons of Comprehensive Community Initiatives at the City Level: The Case of the Urban Health Initiative *The Foundation Review* 1(1) 85-95.

Beth C. Weitzman, Diana Silver, Tod Mijanovich, Caitlyn Brazill (2008). If you build it, will they come? Estimating unmet demand for after-school programs in America's distressed cities. *Youth and Society* 40 (1) 3-34.

Joanne Brady and Beth C. Weitzman. (2007). Inconsistencies in Place Definition: How Different Operational Place Definitions Effect Estimates of Adolescent Smoking and Drinking Risk. *Health and Place* 13: 562-568.

Beth C. Weitzman, Diana Silver, Caitlyn Brazill. (2006) Efforts to Improve Public Policy and Programs Through Improved Data Practices: Experiences in Fifteen Distressed American Cities. *Public Administration Review* 66(3) 386-399.

Charles Brecher, Diana Silver, Cynthia Searcy, Beth C. Weitzman. (2005). Following the Money: Using Expenditure Analysis as an Evaluation Tool. *American Journal of Evaluation* 26(2) 166-188.

Adria Gallup-Black, Beth C. Weitzman. (2004). Teen Pregnancy and Urban Youth: Competing Truths, Complacency and Perceptions of the Problem. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 34: 366-375.

Charles Brecher, Cynthia Searcy, Diana Silver and Beth C. Weitzman. (2004). What Does Government Spend on Children? Evidence from Five Cities. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.

Tod Mijanovich, Beth C. Weitzman. (2003). Which 'Broken Windows' Matter? School, Neighborhood, and Family Characteristics Associated with Youths' Feelings of Unsafety. *Journal of Urban Health* 80 (3), 400-416.

Diana Silver, Beth C. Weitzman, Charles Brecher. (2002). Setting an Agenda for Local Action: The Limits of Expert Opinion and Community Voice. *Policy Studies Journal* 30(3) 379 -395.

Beth C. Weitzman, Diana Silver, Keri Nicole-Dillman. (2002). Integrating a Comparison Group Design into a Theory of Change Evaluation: The Case of the Urban Health Initiative. *American Journal of Evaluation* 23 (4), 371-385.

Dissertations

Tod Mijanovich (2008). *The Influence of Place-Based Characteristics on the Health and Well-being of Children*. Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University.

Cynthia Searcy (2007). *Are Adolescent Eating and Exercise Behaviors Contributing to Youth Obesity in the U.S.?* Maxwell School, Syracuse University.

Diana Silver (2006). *My Baby Takes the Morning Train: An Investigation of Metropolitan Interdependence*. Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University.

Fellowships and Honors

Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio Study and Conference Center, Public Affairs Scholars: Beth C. Weitzman and Diana Silver, August 2007.

W.T. Grant Foundation, Distinguished Fellow: Martha Holleman, Policy Advisor to Baltimore Safe and Sound Campaign in residence at New York University, July 2006-May 2008.

2010 Outstanding Evaluation Award from the American Evaluation Association

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Prepared: 2011