An Overview of Project VITAL: Vacant lot Improvement to Transform Adolescent Lives
Background

People living near vacant lots and abandoned buildings exhibit poor health:

• Studies have shown that such spaces provoke fear, anxiety, and depression for nearby neighbors (Burt et al., 2021; Garven et al., 2012)

BUT....Greening vacant lots by removing trash, mowing, and enhancing them with landscaping or gardens has been shown to reduce crime and violence (Branas et al., 2018; Kondo et al, 2016), improve perceptions of neighborhood safety (Branas et al., 2018), and promote mental health (South et al, 2015, 2018).
What about adolescents?

• While most research to date has focused on adult residents, far less is known about the impact of greening on adolescents.
  • Even though adolescents spend more time in the areas surrounding their homes than adults, AND
  • Neighborhood research shows that adolescents have much different experiences and perceptions of neighborhood compared to adults

• Evidence on the impact of greenspace and adolescent health does show that:
  • Living next to greenspace improves adolescent development (Sprague et al., 20122)
  • Engaging in young people in greening activities improves employment opportunities (City of Atlanta, 2017)
  • Exposure is positively associated with emotional resilience, increased happiness, and lower incidences of psychiatric disorders especially among those who live in urban environments (Fleckney and Bentley, 2021)
Situation in Baltimore

• Baltimore City has over 20,000 vacant lots and additional 17,000 abandoned buildings (Baltimore Green Network)
  • Approximately 900 vacant lots have been greened to date; but restoration is variable
    • Mowing and trash pick up
    • Community gardens
    • Raised flowerbeds and tree planting
    • Art murals

• The City and many other NGOs have a plan to ‘clean and green’ every vacant lot... and this provides us with a great opportunity to examine the impact of various restoration activities on the health of adolescent residents
Overall study goal: To determine whether vacant lot restoration strategies reduce health disparities among young people, including what types of restoration works best, for whom, and why.

Short-term objectives:
1. Build a sharable database containing key characteristics of restored and unrestored vacant lots;
2. Conduct a mixed-methods longitudinal study on changes in adolescent health associated with exposure to vacant lot restoration;
3. Embed a cost-effectiveness study to determine the impact of different restoration programs on youth crime and violence; mental health; and food insecurity; and
4. Develop and disseminate a blueprint for reducing adolescent health disparities through lot restoration strategies that can be adapted for different U.S. municipalities.
## Longitudinal Study

### Adolescent Survey:
- 3 main health outcomes: violence; mental health, and food insecurity
- Data will be collected among approximately 600 adolescents aged 14-19 years

### In-depth Interviews:
- Approximately 21-24 adolescents aged 14-19 years who live next to restored vacant lots (with varying levels of quality) will be interviewed to gather perceptions of impact of restored vacant lots

### Observations:
- Restored lots within 2 blocks of survey sample will be observed to identify type of greening and quality
A few scenes from survey launch:
Our Team

• A multi-sectoral collaboration of individuals and organizations including:
  
  • **Researchers** across four different departments in JHSPH, University of Maryland, Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance at University of Baltimore, as well as the U.S.D.A Forest Service
  
  • **State and local agencies**, including the Baltimore Office of Sustainability, DPW, and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and
  
  • **Community-based organizations**, including Baltimore Green Space, Parks and People Foundation, Civic Works, and National Recreation and Parks Association
Database to date

Project VITAL Greening Lots

Filter Lots by Attribute

Site Name: None
Organization Source: No category selected
Type of Lot: No category selected

Clean and Green
Forest
Garden
Pocket Park

Current Database of Lot Locations (2022)

Total Parcels on the Map 6.2k
Total Sites on the Map 871

More information about Project VITAL (Vacant lot improvement to Transform Adolescent Lives) can be found at bniqfi.org/projectvital

Data provided by Baltimore City Housing and Community Development, Baltimore City Environmental Control Board, Baltimore Green Space, and Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future.

Data compiled by Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance - Jacob France Institute.
THANK YOU!!