HOPE Building Block Series #3: Safe, Stable, and Equitable Environments

In the previous installment of our HOPE Building Blocks series, we explored Social and Civic Engagement, which emphasizes the importance of being an active participant in one's community. This type of engagement builds empathy for others, encourages feelings of belonging, and leads to robust support systems. This month, we will highlight the Environment Building Block. Specifically, HOPE highlights the importance of safe, stable, and equitable environments.

Research has confirmed correlations between a person's environment and their health and well-being outcomes. The Prevention Institute (2017) developed the Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience Framework, which shows how negative community experiences (violence, poverty, damaged community conditions, etc.) impact the individual, and how the individual, who is part of the community, impacts their environment. This produces a cycle of trauma. The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) also support this framework, which is "the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affects a wide range of health functioning and quality-of-life outcomes and risks," (Healthy People, 2030). The five domains of SDOH include: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context. When these domains are not met, and become adverse experiences, there is a major impact on "people's health, well-being, and quality of life," (Healthy People, 2030).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a theory focusing on what drives human behavior, states that every person has an innate potential to be self-directed, ambitious, and a driver of their own life. (Ihensekien, 2023). This theory places safety needs as second only to physiological needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. As these needs are fulfilled, it becomes easier for an individual to comfortably access their needs within the other tiers, The Environment building block of HOPE encompasses both of the main focuses of these two frameworks.

Why does this matter to a school like San Diego State University (SDSU)?

On a university campus, a safe environment is one where students feel valued, listened to, and receive a high-quality education (Sege & Browne, 2017). College campuses tend to serve a population that is still going through rapid developmental growth, and therefore provide opportunities and challenges to these developing abilities. Universities are not just spaces where one can focus on bettering oneself, they are often the centerpiece of a community, aiding individuals in finding connections, gaining social capital, and reaching self-actualization.

The **mission** of San Diego State University is to provide a high-quality education to all students, which ultimately contributes to the solving of problems throughout the community and world ("Facts, Mission and History," n.d.). To create welcoming spaces that provide the motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic, for students to collaboratively work towards this goal, the campus environment must be safe from harm, and provide stable and equitable access to resources and supports to all students.

One action that the University is taking is to address common issues of safety and discrimination on campus based on the campus climate survey. This survey has been conducted at SDSU since 2016 to assess the university's implementation of non-discrimination policies. According to the **National Center for Education Statistics** (n.d.), forcible sex offenses accounted for 44% of crime on college campuses in 2020. College-age adults in general tend to be at a higher risk for sexual violence, and are unlikely to report to police (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN], n.d.).

According to the most recent **2022 Campus Climate Survey report**, SDSU's most significant barriers to student participation in sexual violence programming were a lack of awareness (45%) and a lack of time outside of other obligations (35%). SDSU has a strong framework in place for identifying and addressing safety concerns on campus. For example, SDSU's Center for Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (CPHD), carries out Title IX programs and responds to reports of discrimination and harassment by conducting hearings, investigations, trainings, and providing supportive services. One such training available to students through SDSU is the Brave Project, which provides trauma-informed training and resources. Additionally, one online tool for SDSU community members is **Inclusive San Diego State**, which aims to promote voluntary restorative justice and other conflict resolution processes.

Another action the University can take is ensuring students have access to safe and affordable housing options. Not only is the cost of living expensive, but many college students are struggling with loneliness, isolation, and depression (American College Health Association, 2019). One way to support students with affordable homes and address their mental health is by offering intergenerational housing options.

A successful example of what this looks like comes from Stanford University, which launched an intergenerational housing program in 2018. Older adults opened their homes to younger students in an effort to promote economic security, reduce loneliness, and foster social connections. Students arranged social activities for the older adults as an alternative to paying rent. Supported by the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens, the article reports about a

dozen students have been referred to this program (Gonzales, 2021). Currently, as part of the **Age-Friendly University initiative**, SDSU's Center for Excellence in Aging and Longevity (CEAL) is in the beginning stages of exploring innovative opportunities for intergenerational housing with students.

Multigenerational housing is common in households of color and has become even more common since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to **Generations United (2021)**, multigenerational families <u>report</u> feeling enhanced bonds with their family members, having an easier time caring for the needs of family members, and an improvement in finances or resources for at least one family member. All these factors, and the stability that comes with them lead to the development of a safe and equitable home environment.

Below are examples of what safe, stable, equitable environments look like in practice.

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Safe

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1. **Emotional safety**: students feel valued and that their opinions and experiences matter to the school.
2. **Physical safety**: students are comfortable on campus and free of fears related to physical violence at all times. Should safety concerns arise, the school provides pathways to address them.

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Stable

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1. **Basic needs** such as adequate food, shelter, and health care are met, and the quality of these basic needs are adequate.
2. A **community environment** where students regularly have opportunities to interact and build relationships with others.

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Equitable

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1. Students feel they are receiving a high quality education. Students feel **represented** in curriculum and school materials.
2. **Discrimination** is addressed on an individual and systemic level.

How can you promote this Building Block?

Part of being in a safe, stable, and equitable environment means knowing how to address problems when they inevitably arise

- Be aware of and seek out resources on or around campus, such as:

- ○ SDSU's <u>bystander intervention</u>
- ○ <u>SDSU Basic Needs Center</u> (Economic Crisis Response Team)
- ○ The <u>Brave Project</u> from SDSU's Women's Resource Center
- Inform others of resources when possible
  - ○ Many people do not reach out for help because they do not realize help is available.
- Create safe spaces
  - ○ Whether it be through individual conversations and relationships, or through group activities such as clubs, **you can be a person others consider "safe"** by using equitable language, empathizing, and being open minded towards different viewpoints in your day-to-day life.

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