



Impacts of Housing on Health Equity and Steps for Systems Changes

2020-2021

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BACKGROUND OF FLOURISH ST. LOUIS



FLOURISH St. Louis was formed to address the infant mortality crisis in the St. Louis region. Issues like systemic racism, poverty and access to health services inhibit Black families' ability to flourish. Our region's transportation, housing, employers, schools and social services all need to be part of the solution.

FLOURISH's Community Leaders Cabinet prioritized Social Determinants of Health as a focus area to improve infant vitality in the region with the biggest focus on Housing and Transportation.



OUR
North Star

Achieving zero racial disparities in infant mortality by 2033

HOUSING EXPERIENCES IN ST. LOUIS



Sam Blue

Sam Blue lived at the Clinton Peabody Housing Complex for 10 years with his wife and 9 children. As an active participant on the Tenant Association Board, he took part in advocating for tenants and communicating with management to address conflict. One particular issue was the mice infestation of the entire complex. Blue brought this issue forward at a FLOURISH meeting surrounding a discussion about safe sleep. Blue made the committee aware of the mice infestation issue that had been going on at Clinton Peabody and was affecting the health and wellbeing of tenants. He recalls stating, "There is no such thing as safe sleep when there's a mice infestation". Blue described the severity of the issue, noting that residents were having to open windows to escape the odor and lay down materials on the floor to try and prevent mice from entering their units. .

Residents also didn't feel comfortable leaving their kids alone in such conditions and were not able to cook due to the contamination of the droppings. He believed the mice infestation issue had been going on for a few years following the deconstruction of nearby buildings, and it seemed like residents were just tolerating it. Blue stated, "People didn't want to be homeless, so they did what they could to live and survive. Living in these conditions became a way of life just so that people could have a place to stay". When reflecting on how this infestation affected the health and wellbeing of himself and his family members, Blue explained how his daughter's asthma significantly worsened as a result of exposure to the mice droppings. This required her to separate from the rest of the family and move out entirely. He recalled that this infestation resulted in the separation of many other families at the complex for similar reasons. Blue himself was under a significant amount of stress as a result of these living conditions, the health issues he and his family experienced due to the infestation, working a full-time job, and attempting to address issues with management. After experiencing mental health issues and hospitalizations that resulted from the infestation, his family required legal assistance in order to secure other housing arrangements. Blue and his family moved out of Clinton Peabody Housing Complex after 10 years for the sake of their health and wellbeing. He noted that many efforts went into addressing the mice infestation issue, and he expressed gratitude that Generate Health was able to get involved and draw much needed attention to the issue. Blue acknowledged the sense of relief he felt when Generate Health got involved, as it allowed him to focus more on the health of himself and his family. Although he admitted that there is still much work to be done to support tenants, he does feel that Clinton Peabody is in a much better state and that tenants seem to be able to focus on their health and ask for help when they need it. Moving forward, he is hopeful that we can find ways to be more creative with our communication to ensure that the voices of community members are heard and that there is a greater sense of urgency in the approach we use to help families like those at Clinton Peabody.

HOUSING EXPERIENCES IN ST. LOUIS



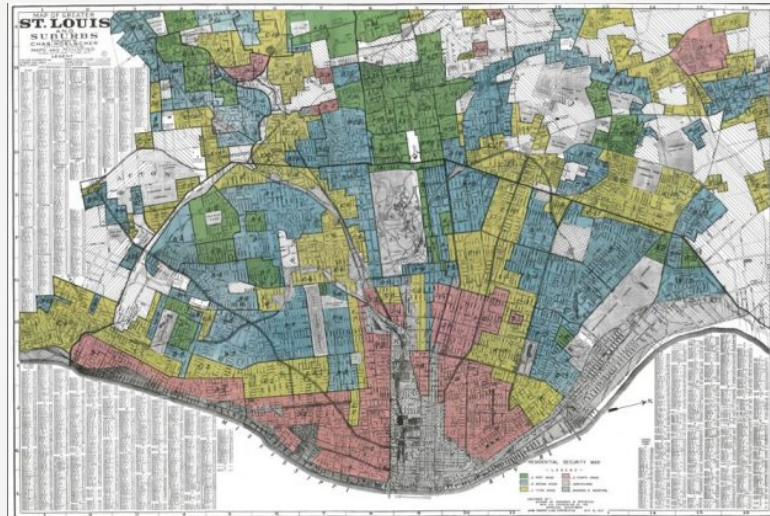
Meredith Childs

Meredith Childs moved out of her mother's house at the age of 18 after getting pregnant. After struggling to maintain affordable and safe housing arrangements, she moved back in with her mom and applied for public and low-income housing. Childs was placed in low-income housing in Peoria, IL a few months after giving birth. When she became pregnant again a few years later, she moved in with a friend. Childs recalled finding out she had gestational diabetes in her 2nd trimester at a prenatal appointment. She broke down in front of her provider due to the overwhelming stress of being unhoused while pregnant with gestational diabetes and a toddler to care for.

She expressed feeling helpless, noting that although her provider offered her all of the cash he had on him at the time, she knew that this still wasn't going to help her secure a place to stay. Fortunately, Childs was connected to a small church at the time that was able to assist her by providing her with needed resources that would ultimately allow her to get back on her feet. Childs reflected on how the trauma she experienced throughout her upbringing contributed to what she described as "self-destructive behavior" as she grew older. She believed this behavior was also a result of childhood trauma issues she was experiencing that were not being addressed, which ultimately led to her struggles with securing and maintaining stable housing. Reflecting on her own experience, Childs emphasized the importance of addressing all social determinants of health and connecting people to the resources they need so that they do not end up in situations similar to her own. Childs stated, "We can build 100 units and put people in them, but without the connections and safety nets required to maintain a home, we're going to have people struggling with the same issues". After raising her 2 children, Childs returned to school and obtained a Bachelor's degree in Human Services and a Master's degree in Healthcare Administration. Her youngest, Kayla, is a 25-year-old graduate of the University of Missouri – St. Louis who is currently teaching English as a second language in South Korea. Her oldest, Kiara, is 30 years old, recently graduated with her Master's degree, and just bought her very first home. Childs is an involved member of FLOURISH More and supports the work of the committee towards addressing the barriers that are preventing people from securing and maintaining quality and affordable housing. Moving forward, her hope is that organizations can work together to help address individual trauma and mental health issues so that the social supports put in place can actually work towards getting people the assistance they need.

HISTORY OF HOUSING IN ST. LOUIS

The relationship between housing and health is a result of many structural and societal influences. Housing serves an important role as a social determinant of health for Black pregnant and parenting families, and this important relationship has been shaped by historical policies that have upheld systemic racism.



REDLINING

Beginning in the 1930s, redlining maps were created for major metropolitan areas to help banks determine the best areas for mortgage lending.

This resulted in limited housing available to Black families but only in less desirable neighborhoods. At the time the St. Louis redlining map was created, most of the municipalities in St. Louis County hadn't been created yet, so there wasn't map-related redlining in the county.

RESTRICTIVE DEED COVENANTS

Clauses written into property deeds stating that a property couldn't be sold or rented to someone non-white. These were much more prevalent in the county. Many new subdivisions and neighborhoods in the county had racial restrictions written into all deeds in the development or neighborhoods. Even if prospective Black homeowners could get approved for a mortgage and could afford housing, covenants prevented them from purchasing in more desirable locations. This was standard practice until 1948, when the *Shelley v. Kramer* outcome deemed that these covenants weren't enforceable; however, the practice wasn't really illegal until the Fair Housing Act passed in 1968.

Housing Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted with housing stakeholders across the region who participate in FLOURISH More. These interviews gathered insight on how the housing sector of St. Louis is impacting the health of Black pregnant and parenting families and how to effectively enact systems changes, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

Information collected from these interviews was used to capture a better understanding of how social determinants of health such as housing and neighborhood stabilization are contributing to the infant mortality crisis from varying community perspectives, as well as what leverage points. FLOURISH can use for future change.

Interview Process

Representatives from various organizations throughout the St. Louis region were contacted by email and asked to discuss their perspectives on the housing sector in St. Louis and how it has impacted Black pregnant and parenting families. Interviews were conducted via phone and zoom for roughly 30 minutes, and the individuals interviewed were asked a set of prepared questions. The information gathered was recorded through written notes and compiled in order to identify themes. Representatives from the following organizations were interviewed:

Anthem
Equal Housing and Opportunity Council
FLOURISH MORE members
Rise Community Development
Legal Services of Eastern Missouri
St. Louis County Department of Public Health
Saint Louis University

UNCOVERING THE CURRENT STATE OF HOUSING

Questions Asked

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION AND WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF THIS POSITION THAT HELP YOU TO SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION'S OVERALL MISSION AS IT RELATES TO THE HOUSING SECTOR OF ST. LOUIS?

TELL ME MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW REGARDING THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSING SECTOR OF ST. LOUIS AND HOW IT HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME, AS WELL AS HOW IT HAS IMPACTED PREGNANT AND PARENTING FAMILIES

WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED THROUGH YOUR POSITION AS IT RELATES TO NAVIGATING THE HOUSING SECTOR OF ST. LOUIS, AND HOW DID YOU HANDLE THOSE?

THROUGHOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH SERVING IN YOUR POSITION, HOW HAS THE HOUSING SECTOR HAD AN IMPACT SPECIFICALLY ON BLACK PREGNANT AND PARENTING FAMILIES?

HOW HAS THE NATURE OF CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES NAVIGATING THE HOUSING SECTOR CHANGED OVER TIME? ARE THEY PRETTY CONSISTENT OR DO BARRIERS SEEM TO CONSTANTLY DIFFER?"

WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR EFFECTIVELY MAKING SYSTEMS CHANGES TO THE HOUSING SECTOR OF ST. LOUIS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE UPON HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR ST. LOUIS RESIDENTS?"

UNCOVERING THE CURRENT STATE OF HOUSING



Themes Identified

**Evolution of St. Louis'
housing sector**

**Housing sector's
impact on Black
pregnant and
parenting families**

**Challenges with
navigating the
housing sector**

**Key steps for
effective systems
changes**

UNCOVERING THE CURRENT STATE OF HOUSING

All levels of the socioecological model need movement in order to improve the housing sector in St. Louis. This includes access to affordable, quality housing for families, as well as safe neighborhoods to raise their families in.



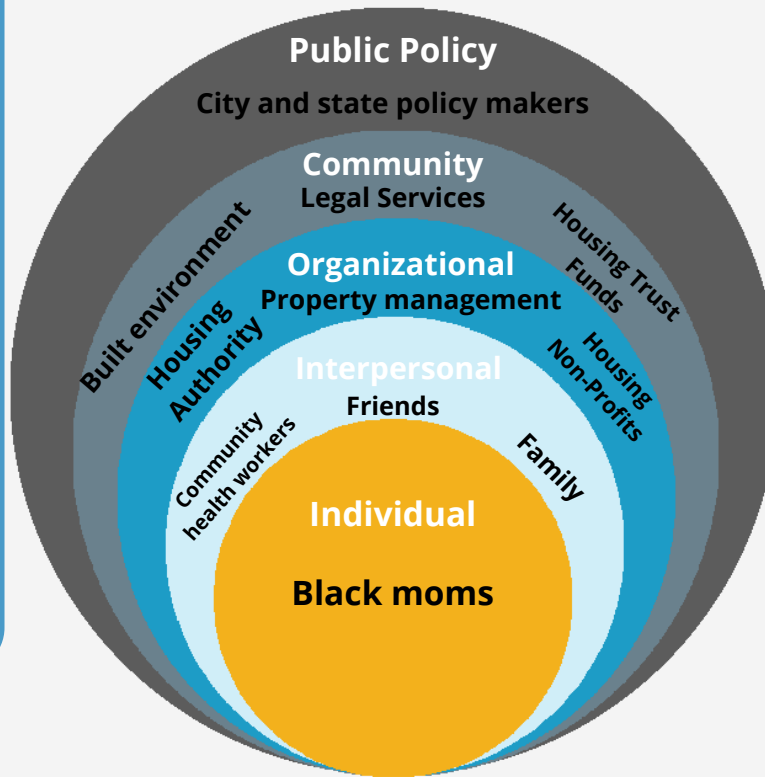
"Because of certain policy limitations, change doesn't seem to be happening because everyone cannot be helped despite constant efforts"

"The system is broken, which makes it hard to help residents"

"The housing sector does not seem to have changed much over time. The growth that has occurred is surface level, and it constantly seems like we're back at square one"

"Houses are much older and many remain in poor conditions"

"Racial segregation is so deeply engrained in St. Louis that it has made change in our neighborhoods difficult"



"Landlords and housing companies are not educating tenants about their rights, and young poor black moms have lost their children due to poor quality housing and lack of resources"

"Housing data is difficult for organizations to collect in order to frame the problem"

"Traumas that residents have experienced and continue to experience are not being considered"

"Families are not aware of their housing rights, and cannot advocate for themselves when needs are unmet or conditions are poor"

"Historic and continued racism continues to allow inequities in quality and affordable housing, ultimately impacting birth outcomes"

FLOURISH'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES

FLOURISH MORE

From FLOURISH St. Louis' involvement with the CityMatCH Equity in Birth Outcomes Institute, **FLOURISH Motivated Outreach for the Restoration of Equity (MORE)** was launched to address housing issues that can impact the health of Black moms and babies. Some issues include: old homes with lead paint, pest/rodent infestations, the presence of mold and other asthma triggers, overcrowding and affordability.



CLINTON-PEABODY HOUSING COMPLEX

When a community member alerted FLOURISH MORE to a mice infestation at the Clinton-Peabody government housing complex, they took action knowing that these hazardous living conditions could impact the health and well-being of babies and children living there. With the help of FLOURISH MORE, the appalling living conditions at the Clinton-Peabody housing complex in St. Louis City were brought to light through petitions, securing the media's attention, arming residents to advocate for their families, and more. This resulted in the engagement of elected officials and working with residents to successfully advocate for improvements, including the implementation of new housing policies. FLOURISH MORE continues to support Clinton-Peabody residents through diaper drives, mom support groups, and tenant right educational sessions.

FLOURISH'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES

ICTS Grant

FLOURISH received funding for a 1-year grant that begins on March 1st, 2021. This grant will serve to support FLOURISH More in expanding their partnership with Clinton-Peabody residents.

FLOURISH More plans to host four "Mommy & Me" cafes for residents to discuss health and wellness topics, as well as provide a setting for peer to peer support. This funding will also allow FLOURISH More to work on a photovoice project with 10 pregnant women who are Clinton-Peabody residents, during which they will be asked to take pictures of their environment and think about how it may be helping or impeding their health.

St. Louis County Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

Generate Health holds a seat at the table of the The St. Louis County Housing Board of Commissioners, which is made up of five members appointed by the county executive that review, support, and monitor housing operations. In addition to overseeing the Executive Director of the Housing Authority, the Board shapes and influences sustainability of housing policies. Due to the many systems that play a role in influencing housing operations (legal services, policies, health insurance, etc) the Board prioritizes active discussions with those sectors in order to ensure that the primary housing needs of residents are being addressed.

Advocacy Efforts

Advocacy efforts in support of utility shut-off and eviction moratoriums are ongoing. FLOURISH continues to advocate to ensure that people are able to stay in their homes despite other challenges .

FLOURISH Grantees

Several FLOURISH grantees have been funded to implement projects related to providing safe and affordable housing to Black pregnant and parenting families in the region. These organizations include: **Away From Home** and **Community Response**

HOW YOU CAN HELP



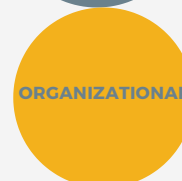
ENSURE THAT RESIDENTS ARE KNOWLEDGABLE ABOUT THEIR HOUSING RIGHTS

- Distribute the EHOC 'Know Your Rights' flyer via social media



STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

- Engage in outreach events with community members



ENSURE THAT HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS ARE EQUITABLE AND FAMILY FRIENDLY

- Advocate for the implementation of regular cultural congruency trainings for organizational staff



ADDRESS LACK OF RESOURCES AND BASIC NEEDS

- Listen to Black families and address their basic needs



IMPROVE UPON HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAIN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Sign up for and participate in activities/coalitions that support the affordable housing trust fund
- Meet with policymakers to advocate for utility and eviction moratoriums