



## Community Connectors 2015: Safety in Tukwila

Over the course of the past three years of working deeply in community, one of the common themes that came up in many conversations was the issue of safety. Community members are concerned about their own safety and the safety of their children. In response to feedback, the City of Tukwila made safety one of its main priorities for 2015.

In support of the City's focus on safety, the Community Connectors Program, a partnership between the City of Tukwila, Forterra and Global to Local, collaborated to bring important safety information to historically under reached communities, as well as engage in meaningful conversations about the specifics of safety concerns to brainstorm ideas for how to best address these issues. This project took place over the course of 2015 and culminated with a successful community event in October.

In addition to the focus on safety, we also had an internal goal for the program of providing more intentional leadership development for the Connectors to ensure they build leadership skills as their work with the program continues. In 2015 this was realized through engaging the Connectors in the entire planning process, including content preparation for meetings and facilitating event logistics.

We had a strong team that made all of this work possible:

- City of Tukwila: Joyce Trantina, Mayor's Office
- Forterra: Becca Meredith, Policy Program Manager
- Global to Local: Virginia Herrera-Paramo & Allison Mountjoy
- Community Connectors: Osman, Reina, Monica, Linda, Naimo, (woman from Rainbow Haven)

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## GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

The 2015 Safety Project was the third successful Community Connectors project and continued the engagement with four important historically underrepresented communities: Somali, Latino, Burmese and Amharic/Arabic. The goals set out at the beginning of the year were as follows:

- Improve community safety
- Build new relationships
- Support Connectors in taking on increased leadership roles
- Support the adoption of a Comprehensive Plan that reflects input from 2014 community outreach

To accomplish these goals the partnership completed the following activities:

- **Safety**
  - Hosted four planning meetings with City staff and the Community Connectors
    - April Planning Meeting
    - May: Police Department
    - June: Fire Department and Emergency Preparedness
    - August: Community Event Preparation
  - Planned and hosted a Community Event on October 20<sup>th</sup> (See notes in Appendix A)
  - Hosted an evaluation & celebration
- **Comprehensive Plan**
  - Supported Community Connectors in speaking at one City Council Meeting
  - Wrote a letter to City Council signed by the Community Connectors
- **Internal Staff Support**
  - Hosted two Interdepartmental Team Meetings to discuss Community Connectors and City Equity Team



Fire Chief speaks with the Burmese community about safety concerns in Tukwila at the October 22nd Community Event. Photo Credit: Hannah Letinich

## SUMMARY

Overall we achieved the goals we set out at the beginning of 2015. Stronger relationships are being built between City staff, Community Connectors and community members. It was inspiring to see many of the same community members coming to the October event that were present at the event in 2013. The City's investment in these historically underrepresented communities is clearly paying off and will continue to grow in coming years. Below is a summary of each of the areas of focus.

### *Improve Community Safety*

While improving community safety is a long-term goal and will be an ongoing process for the City and Tukwila residents, we made some significant strides towards this big picture goal. Most importantly we provided deep education for the Community Connectors who are the City's ambassadors in the Community. After four planning meetings and numerous discussions with City staff, the Connectors became more versed in how the City is working to address public safety issues in Tukwila. They were then able to share this information at our community event to a broader audience. There was an amazing amount of information shared at the community event and four of the top points were:

1. A community member can call 911 and remain anonymous – this is particularly important for the City's undocumented population.
2. When to call 911 – several groups commented on having a deeper understanding of when to call 911.
3. Parent responsibility with youth – helping parents understand that they are responsible for their children's actions
4. Marijuana Laws – this was most relevant to seeing people smoking in public areas

We also asked community members what they could do to help improve safety and the most frequent response was to get to know their neighbors. The City of Tukwila could play an important role moving forward in supporting neighborhood gatherings to establish more of a sense of community.

### *Leadership Development*

We provided the Connectors with clear leadership development opportunities over the course of the year. They were able to take part in decision making regarding the community event (power sharing) and ultimately decided that we should have a large community event to foster cross-cultural relationships as opposed to smaller culturally specific events. Connectors also determined the specific content pieces that were included in the community event presentations. This included discussions about parent responsibility and marijuana laws.

Moving forward it would be helpful to provide more explicit leadership development trainings such as public speaking, letter writing and/or navigating the City. It is difficult to transition from

the Connectors just receiving information and implementing, versus engaging and involving them in the whole process in a meaningful way. Increased skill development could be accompanied with increased responsibility and accountability.

### *Build Relationships*

Throughout the year we built new relationships particularly between the Community Connectors and members of the Police and Fire Departments. These are highly valuable relationships because it could lead to Connectors and their communities and families being more willing to contact them when there is an emergency. This goal, in many important ways, feeds into the improving community safety goal.

### *Comprehensive Plan*

The Connectors showed-up and spoke at an important City Council Meeting to speak about the Comprehensive Plan and also wrote a letter. Specifically, they were speaking to the importance of affordable housing to ensure that low-income communities in Tukwila are able to remain in place as the City continues to grow and develop.

### *City of Tukwila Internal Structure*

The Connectors team continued to meet with the Interdepartmental Team and stay connected with the equity team as they formed. In 2016 there could be more focus on developing the structure and staffing necessary for the City to support more of the program operations.

## **2016 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Programmatic
  - Provide more explicit leadership development trainings such as public speaking, letter writing and/or navigating the City.
  - Host and/or facilitate more community gatherings for people to get to know each other. This was highlighted as a way to help with safety issues.
- Structure
  - To support other recommendations for 2016, I recommend the City taking over more of the Connector management. This could include setting-up the contracts, having quarterly check-ins with Connectors and/or full management of Connectors time and deliverables.

The focus on safety in 2015 was on step towards improving safety for Tukwila communities. New relationships were built and important information was shared with communities who have limited access to the resources they need to keep their families safe. We hope this work planted

important seeds that will continue to flourish in coming years. The Connectors team also supported the final stages of the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, ensuring that much of the feedback gathered in 2013 and 2014 was kept in the final document. Lastly, members of the Tukwila Cultural Advisory Team supported this effort as two of its members launched a City of Tukwila Equity Team as a way to incorporate the issues of cultural awareness and social equity into day-to-day work activities.

Forterra was honored to work with such an amazing and looks forward to continuing to strengthen the Connectors program for the residents of Tukwila.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Becca Meredith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Becca Meredith, Program Manager, Forterra