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## What Risks do African Youth Face of Gang Involvement? A Community Needs Assessment in Multnomah County

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***What risks do African youth face  
of gang involvement?  
A community needs assessment  
in Multnomah County***

**Abstract**

African youth face deep challenges in attaining success in the USA today. Opportunities for academic and economic success are limited, constrained by today's neoliberal conservatism in public policy and facing a harsh environment for getting a foothold in employment. This report documents the risks such youth face for becoming gang-involved, drawing forth original quantitative and qualitative study of risk factors and perspectives of key local and national leaders on community needs, assets and ideas for service supports that are likely to protect African youth, and help them reach adulthood with their futures intact.

***Marie-Elena Reyes and Ann Curry-Stevens***

The Center to Advance Racial Equity,  
Portland State University

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We also thank Dr. Andrew Dyke, Senior Economist at ECONorthwest for conducting a customized data run of the American Community Survey for our analysis.

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*to Multnomah County for their support of this research study.*



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Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization  
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**IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION**

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## Executive Summary

Today in Multnomah County, youth gang involvement is an urgent issue. While funding has been made available for culturally-specific services to some communities (African American, Latino, and Asian, and elsewhere in the nation to the Vietnamese community), nothing has been provided locally for the African immigrant and refugee community.

In response to rising concerns from community leaders about this omission, a small research study was commissioned by Multnomah County, and the Center to Advance Racial Equity was asked by the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) to gather available data on the risk factors present in the community, and to consolidate program ideas for moving forward.

This research has indeed found a community with a high level of gang involvement risk factors present for its youth. While challenged by a lack of comprehensive data (for example, not knowing school dropout levels of African youth, nor knowing at what rates the police are seeing criminal activity among African youth), we have used the best data available to us, and additionally interviewed, surveyed and held focus groups with a total of 95 different participants, drawing from key informants, Africa House staff, parents and youth. These 95 community members, mostly African, asserted that parents are deeply worried for their children and generally at a loss over how to support them, and that some African youth are displaying signs of significant gang involvement, and criminal activity. We do not know the size of this population.

We know, however, significant elements regarding the African youth population at risk of gang involvement:

- 55% live in poverty; among families headed by female single parents, 70% live in poverty
- Almost one-in-two African youth live in single-parent families
- Two-in-three are likely to have moved in one year
- 62% do not meet academic expectations, making them at risk of leaving school
- Unemployment is pronounced at 17% (as averaged across the years 2006 to 2011), perhaps more meaningfully at levels more than double that of Whites
- Underemployment is pronounced, with an estimated 45% not having their international experience recognized, and a likely one-in-three being in unskilled work when they are credentialed for high-skill jobs
- 46% of African youth are in families who spend more than 50% of their income on housing, with consequences for both poverty and for frequent moving: about 60% of Africans moved at least once during the past year, and 10% moved three or more times.

When we conducted our own assessment of the portion of the African youth community at risk of gang involvement, we were unable to include as many risk factors as we would have liked. We were still able, however, to include: (1) being disconnected from school and work, (2) spending more than 50% of the household's income on housing costs, (3) living in a single parent family, and (4) living in poverty. This part of the research conducted a comparative analysis with the communities which have been afforded a culturally-specific gang program: Latino, Asian, African American, and Vietnamese (not locally explicit,

though community which tends to be the focus of Asian-based gang programs). We also included White in this study. Through a variety of measures of the size of each community with different numbers of risk factors, we concluded that the African community has the highest risk profile of any of the other communities. Yet it is not afforded a culturally-specific program investments.

Abundant insights are generated through this study of the unique challenges facing parents over how to support their children, and by service providers and community leaders of the need for an integrated service delivery system, including cohesive action to align school supports to promote continued engagement as opposed to disengagement from school.

At the close of the report, we gather the narratives of those who contribute and align their perspectives with the literature, and begin to shape the community's preferences for how to best serve at-risk African youth. There is a demonstrated need for African-specific school supports, liaison workers between home and school, and with strong desires voiced in providing tangible education for parents, counseling to support families when they struggle, and an array of community supports to provide African youth with positive protective activities such as sports, summer work, mentoring, internships, and college preparation. Strongly recommended is programming to support positive cultural identity development, such that African youth continue to value their heritage, connect with their elders, and maintain positive engagement with their communities, instead of turning away from it as do many youth. An array of counseling supports are advised, including culturally-specific delivery, group counseling, self-help networks, trauma-based services, and assistance for newcomer integration, including learning more details about how the police and courts operate, and the risks that exist in getting a criminal record. Additional resources for helping families gain economic adequacy and stability will assist to protect youth and etch them back from the edge of being vulnerable to the promises made by gang recruiters for belonging. Finally, expressed needs include educating service providers – particularly schools – about the histories and experiences of the African community.

In conclusion, we have documented considerable needs for African-specific gang prevention and intervention programs. We stop short of asserting the specific design for such a program, but do provide important insights on elements that appear warranted. We suggest that a further research effort be conducted to design the specifics of the program, and that this be conducted as a community-based participatory research project so that community members, leaders, parents and youth can collaborate on its design, and simultaneously generate the resources desired by the community to assist with education and outreach activities. We perceive a need for a community-wide approach to such programs, and for the opportunity for community stakeholders to gather to further discuss pathways to building these approaches and build consensus about what is needed. Ultimately such an approach creates a strong bridge between the community and its service-based interventions, and this can strengthen the community's visibility and leadership and its confidence in finding solutions to its own challenges.

### Research Methodology and Introduction to the Research Team

This research request for a literature review and an investigation of youth gang involvement in the African community of the Portland, OR area, was initiated by the IRCO Africa House staff to the Center to Advance Racial Equity (CARE). The research team on this project was Dr. Ann Curry-Stevens (Director, CARE) and Marie-Elena Reyes, M.S. (Adjunct Research Associate, CARE).

Insights about African youth problems and gang involvement were collected for this report from African community leaders, outreach workers, key informants, parents, and youth through focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Questions for focus group, interviews, and surveys were developed after reviewing the literature on youth gang involvement. Additionally, potential questions were previewed by IRCO staff for cultural appropriateness and research relevance and revised to reflect staff recommendations.

A large focus group with community leaders (approx. 45 participants) was conducted during the Annual Community Needs Assessment Conference at IRCO on June 21, 2014. A second focus group was conducted with five African parents at IRCO on June 25 during a regularly planned session with the help of an IRCO workshop facilitator Megan Wilson and an interpreter. Gender-specific focus groups were held with 36 youth attending the Youth Leadership Workshops at IRCO on June 28. Youth surveys were completed during the gender-specific youth sessions. Additionally, interviews were conducted with six key informants whose anonymity has been upheld in order to respect the confidential nature of their relationships within the communities they serve.

We have integrated an abundance of quotes from participants in this research study, as they capture a stronger and more direct narrative of the experiences of the community. When used, we place the quotes in italicized text.

This research project additionally conducted a quantitative study of risk factors for youth gang violence, narrowed by the data available for this community, and compared the findings in the African community with those in other communities that typically receive specialized attention for their youth: African American, Latino, Asian and Vietnamese. We also compared these communities with the White, non-Latino population. In this part of the study, Dr. Andrew Dyke of ECONorthwest conducted a customized data extraction of the American Community Survey microfile data, using the dataset which averages a five-year time period so that smaller communities can be studied with high levels of reliability. We used the 2008-2012 period for this analysis. The researchers then analyzed these data for the report.

### Data Availability

The African community is typically incorporated within a larger group of “African American/Black” in the majority of datasets. While likely to be “counted,” the specifics of their experience render them a distinct community, which is unfortunately eclipsed when the community is embedded in the larger African American community. This is a community of relative newcomers, frequently having limited English skills (with more than ½ not speaking English very well), refugees and immigrants with distinct health, education and social needs, and arrivals during an era of neoliberalism which is accompanied by

a shrinking commitment to public policy that aims to promote collective wellbeing. In the research partnership between Dr. Ann Curry-Stevens and the Coalition of Communities of Color undertaken since 2008, a pattern of newcomer communities struggling deeply to gain a foothold in the USA has been detailed – and the correlation of a deteriorating policy environment with these struggles has been noted.

This is a pattern of invisibility and it results in our inability to study what is happening to African youth in the following experiences: health (including physical and mental health, health promotion, health risk behaviors, and discrimination), drug and alcohol use/abuse, policing, juvenile justice, adult corrections, child welfare, public housing access, social service access, and food security. In an egregious example (for this study), we do not know the levels of African youth being arrested, detained or convicted for gang violence, or drug possession, or violent crime. We also do not know the levels of African youth being disciplined, suspended or expelled (or even dropping out) of school, though intend in the coming year to conduct a supplemental research study to do customized data runs with local school district data.

In the “Unsettling Profile” disparities report on the African community,<sup>1</sup> two custom data runs were conducted: the first covered the American Community Survey to extract a wide array of data points on the African community (those who identified African as their first or second ancestry, excluding those who first identified as African American). Some of the data in the following sections are extracted from that report. Second, we conducted a customized data run of school district data, using the language identifier for students and pulled those files where there were specific African languages spoken either at home or as students’ first language (school districts include both measures in their student intake data). We use this file to share information about the composition of the African youth community, but urge it be used with caution because it misses those African students who indicated that their language or origin or language spoken at home was either English or French as their primary languages. The data files currently have no way to distinguish French speakers from France from African youth who are from Senegal or Chad where French is the official language (along with 19 other African nations). Or to distinguish English-speaking African American students who grew up in the USA from English-speaking African students who recently emigrated from Sierra Leone (where English is the official language, along with 23 other African nations).

This problem of invisibility is pronounced and part of the recommendations emerging from this report is for improved data systems so that we can better understand what is happening with African youth and their families.

Improvements are on the horizon with two important initiatives. In response to the advocacy work of the Coalition of Communities of Color along with numerous member organizations and other advocacy groups, statewide legislation was passed in 2013 (House Bill 2134), and the procedural rules approved in 2014 that requires the following racial identifier added to the client forms used by the Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Human Services (and all with whom they contract and subcontract): “African” as a racial identifier, existing alongside “African American,” “Caribbean,” and “Other Black.”



“African” means an individual identifying with or descending from any of the racial groups of Africa whose national origin is from a country on the continent of Africa”<sup>2</sup> In addition, at the urging of the community, North African will be identified separately, allowing for and supporting the emergence of the racial grouping “Middle Eastern and North African.” It is anticipated that this legislation will be extended to additional government departments in the coming years.

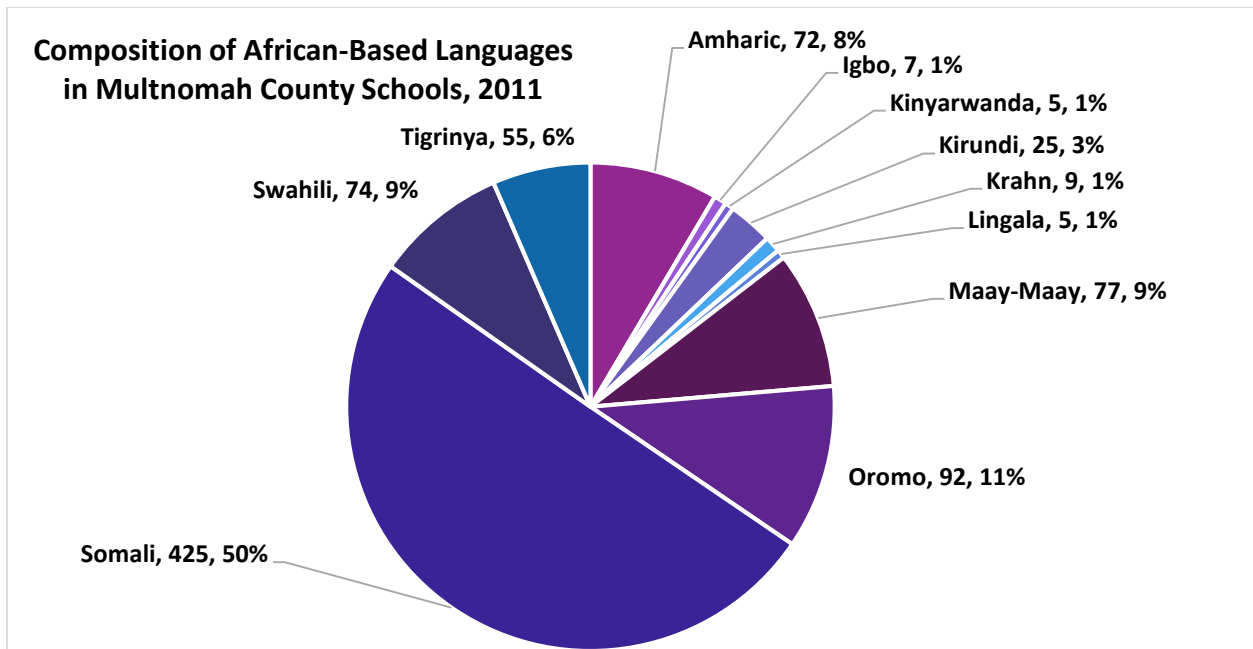
The second data improvement has occurred within Oregon’s largest school district: Portland Public Schools. In response to the voiced concerns of the Coalition of Communities of Color, PPS is adding “African” as a racial identifier separate from “African American” and “Other Black.” Reflecting the highest concentrations of African students, they have added subcategories of Burundian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and other African. These identifiers are included in their “Student Information Form” and will be implemented in the fall of 2014.

Both of these improvements will increase the visibility of the African community, and support efforts to understand issues facing the community. We hope that these initiatives inspire other administrative bodies to follow suit and to integrate efforts to improve data systems and data reporting.

### **Introducing the African community in Multnomah County<sup>3</sup>**

The African community is relatively new in Multnomah County, arriving in significant numbers since 1975, and today is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest immigrant community in the region. This is a diverse community, representing 28 countries, with the Somali, Sierra Leonean, and Egyptian communities making up 70% of the community. Today, the community lives mostly in North and Northeast Portland, with a rising number pushed further into East Multnomah County, in search of more affordable housing.

The origins of the community’s arrival is primarily as refugees, fleeing persecution, violence and civil war in their home countries. The composition of this refugee population in Oregon is mostly Somali, with heavy representation from the following countries: Congo, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi, Liberia and the Sudan. Among school-aged children and youth, we are limited by data availability (as noted above) but are able to share the composition of the heritage (by language) of local African youth in the chart below. Remember that there are 24 African countries with English as their official language and 21 where French is the official language – and both these sets of countries are not included in the below chart.



Source: Data collected from six School Boards and provided by the Oregon Department of Education to Dr. Pat Burk, Portland State University, and tallied by Myste French, MSW, and additionally analyzed by Dr. Curry-Stevens. Note that communities that speak English or French are not included in this chart.

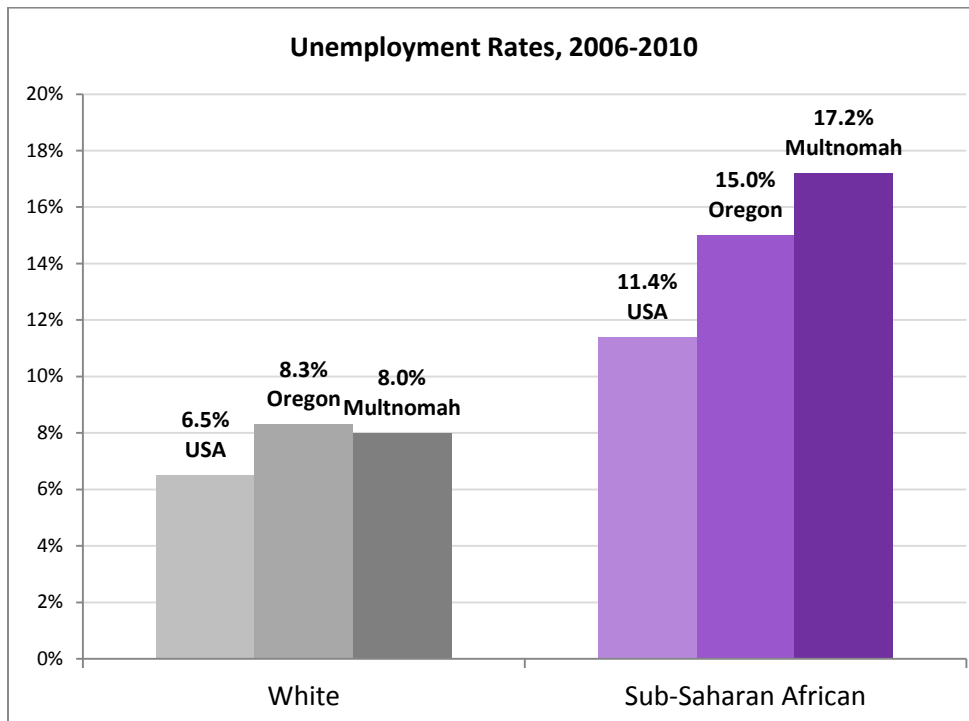
Youth and their families have typically spent too many years in refugee camps, without solid education, health and mental health supports, and with ongoing trauma of insecurity, vulnerability and deep uncertainty of their future. It has been a difficult path for many. Grateful to be afforded a country to call home, inclusion has not been either easy or assured. The integration of immigrants and refugees into the fiber of U.S. society is tentative.

Refugees arriving in the USA receive income support for their first 8 months of arrival, but are required to accept the first job that is offered to them. This means that many forgo the search for work that can pay the bills, and work that is in their career of choice – even work for which they are experienced and credentialed. In a survey conducted for the research report, “African immigrants and refugees in Multnomah County: An unsettling profile,” it is estimated that as many as 45% of Africans have faced employment barriers from not having their international experience recognized. A national study confirms this difficulty: among Africans who arrived in the last ten years, more than 1/3 of highly-skilled Africans are working in unskilled jobs. This means that among those who have work, a considerable number are working considerably below their capacity. Even among those who arrived longer ago, almost 1/4 (22%) face such conditions. This is levels about two times worse than US-born workers, and immigrants from Europe and Asia. Notice that these patterns reflect both colonial and racial patterns – darker skin colored workers have greater difficulties, and immigrants from colonized continents fare much worse than immigrants who have not been subject to such strife.

The dynamics of social inclusion are also troubling. Even among refugees, there has been a shift in dominant discourse that diminishes the sense of obligation that used to exist in the USA towards both

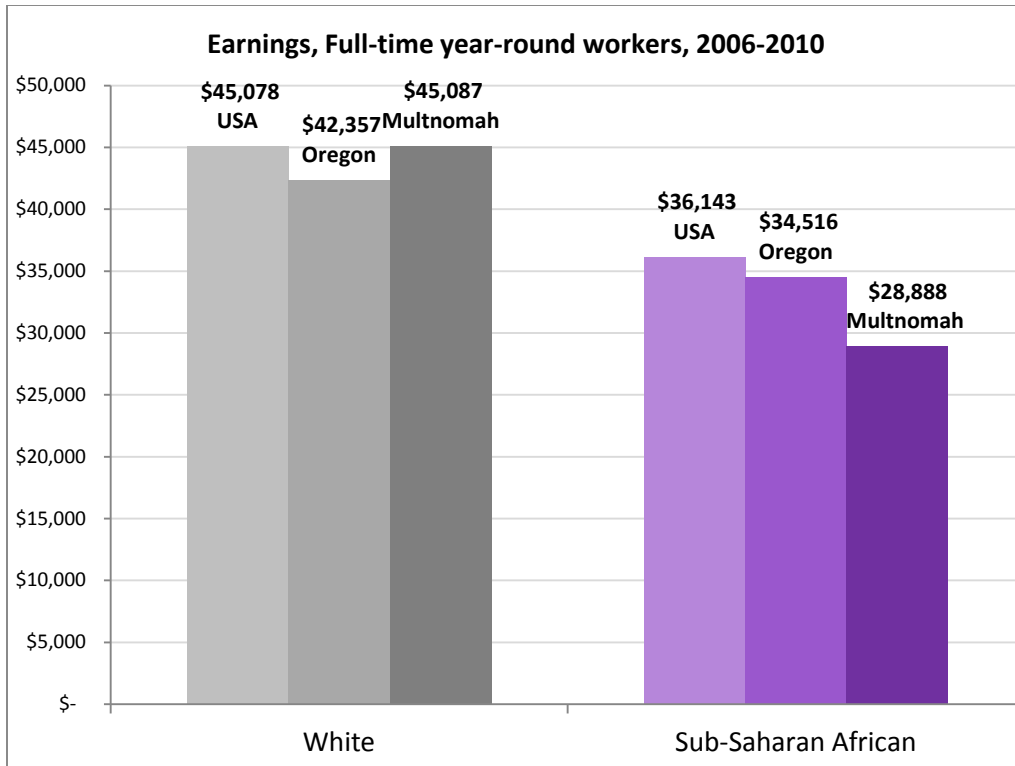
refugees and immigrants who have come to the USA to find a better life – sometimes without any choice, fleeing persecution and fearing for their lives. Such obligation was both part of being a prosperous nation as well as a sense of responsibility for nations rising out of a colonial history. In the neoliberal era of deepening rugged individualism and the narrowing of obligation to ensure a basic standard of living for all, refugees and immigrants have fared particularly poorly as a “degenerative politics” has expanded, and “exploited racist divisions” between communities, and exploited derogatory social constructions of communities of color.<sup>4</sup> Our region is not very welcoming to Africans, and the results are borne out in an array of narrow economic prospects profiled in the chart below. We see constrained employment opportunities, heavy reliance on food stamps, low incomes, and incredibly high poverty rates. Housing, too, is a challenge, with high rents and low incomes creating challenges, and housing discrimination and landlord conflicts being pronounced in community narratives of their experience.

Unemployment (along with the underemployment noted above) is more than double that of Whites.



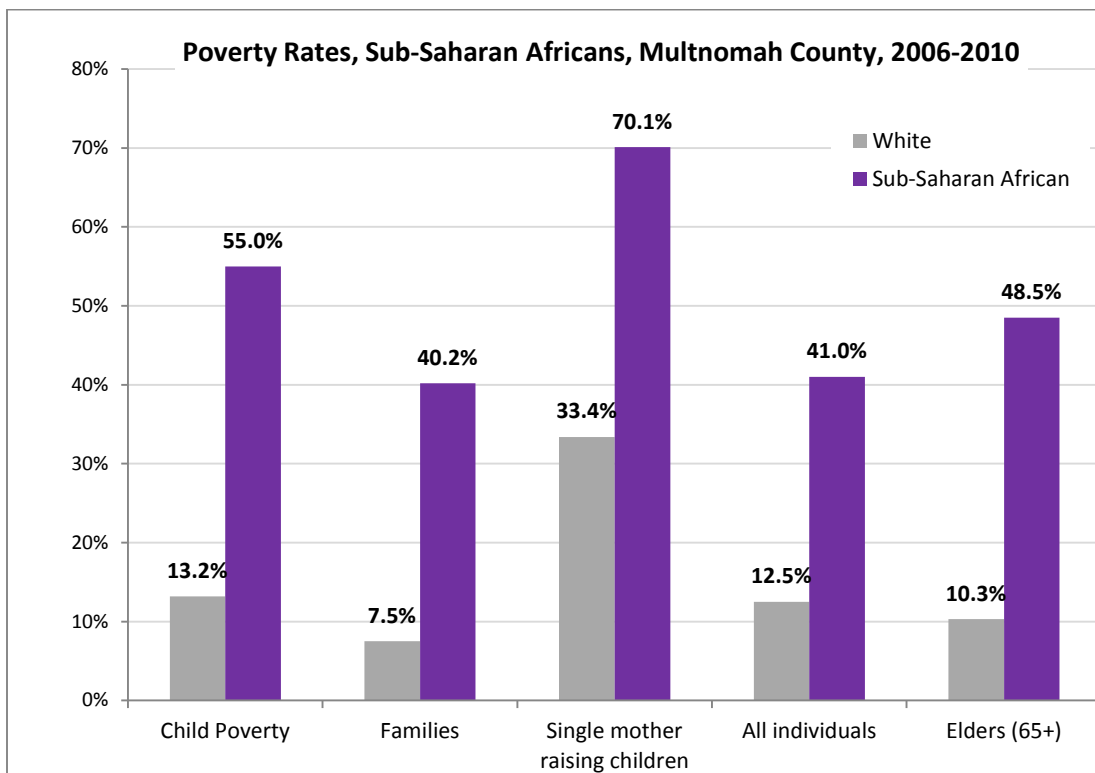
Source: American Community Survey, 2006-10.

Incomes too reflect additional disparities. When comparing the earnings of full-time, year-round workers, Africans earn only a fraction of what White workers earn. For every dollar earned by Whites, Africans earn only 64 cents.



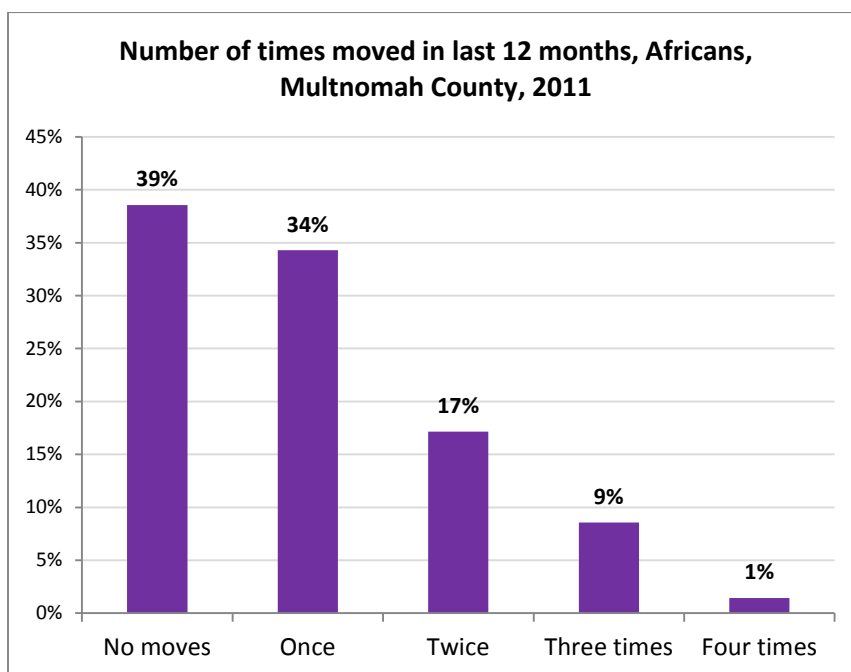
Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010.

With low incomes and employment constraints, poverty rates soar, as illustrated below.



Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010.

And, of course, housing difficulties are pronounced. Almost half of the community spends more than 35% of their income on rent, and few (about ¼) of the community owns their own home, at less than half the rate of whites in the region. A consequence of housing difficulties, and tensions with landlords resulting from high occupancy, language communication difficulties and outright discrimination means that the community moves frequently. The survey done for the “*Unsettling Profile*” report identified that two in every three families moved each year, with 10% moving at least three times. Every time a child or youth moves decreases the likelihood of academic success and increases the chance of becoming disconnected from sports, organized activities, and positive peer culture – all of which position the youth for high risk of gang involvement.



Source: African Community Survey, 2011.

The community’s progress towards economic wellbeing and the stability needed for raising children who have positive futures is imperiled. Combine the economic challenges with barriers to social integration – be it due to language, racism, mental health challenges related to refugee and immigration trauma, social disruption caused by moving or due to implicit racial biases that we all carry, African families are struggling. And when families struggle, their children struggle.

### **Education Challenges Facing Youth in the Region**

Growing up in poverty is a challenge for any child. It translates into considerable emotional insecurity as parents struggle to provide assurances of wellbeing, stability in housing, and confidence that hard work will result in a better life. To be sure, however, the absence of hard work will (for marginalized communities particularly) narrow these life chances. It remains unjust for any child to grow up in poverty – and today more than one-in-two African children are poor. That figure rises to almost two-in-

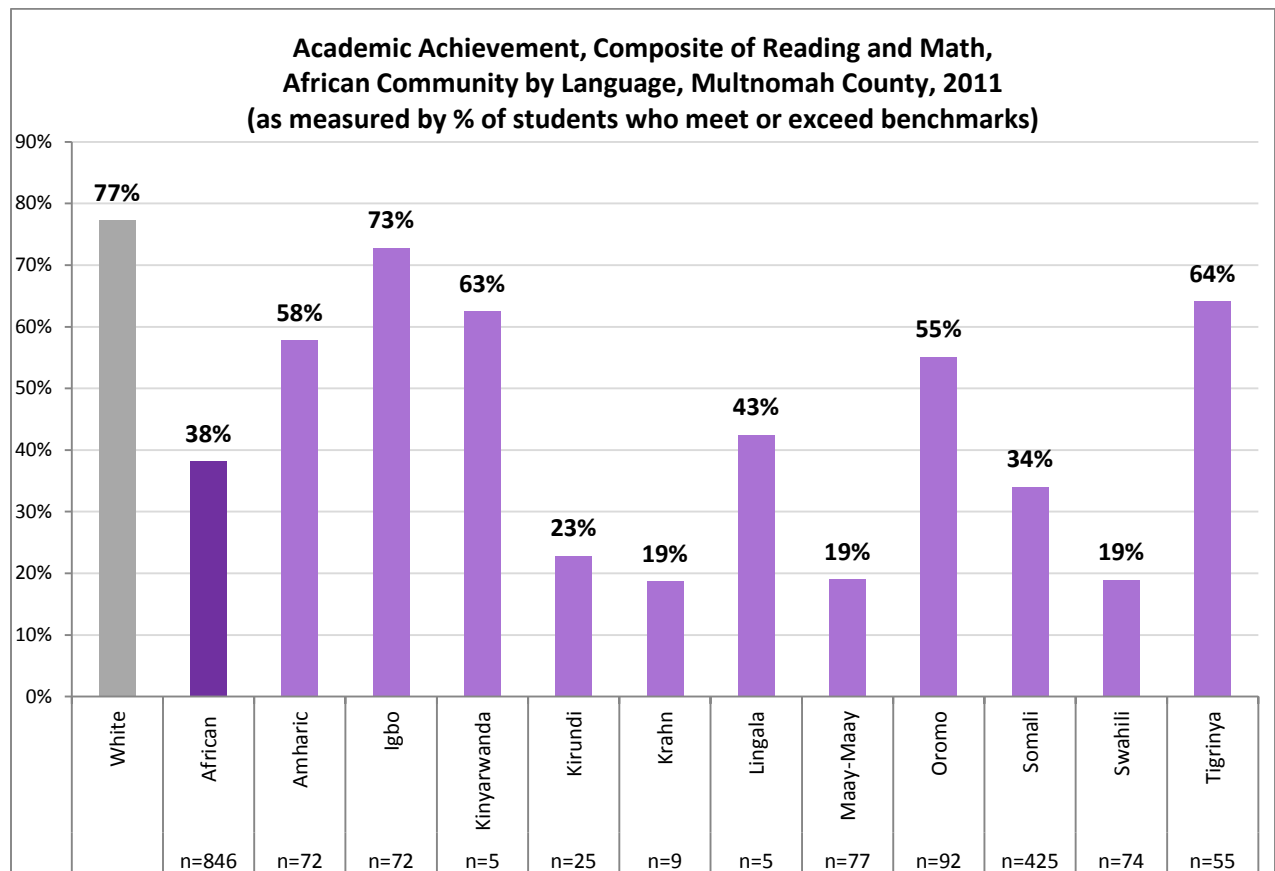
three (at 63%) of Africans are low income (meaning they live with incomes less than twice the poverty rate).

Education is difficult to achieve in the USA. In many cases, refugees have spent numerous years in refugee camps where they have not been in school, or have learned only rudimentary literacy levels.

Once landed in the USA, grade placement is based on age as opposed to academic skills. This is typically far above their education level, particularly when they have been in refugee camps for any length of time. As cited in the “Unsettling Profile” report, a community member says,

*The greatest challenge is that people say, “You’re 15, so you must be in grade 11”... when you’ve missed education for the last 4 to 5 years. So the system has totally failed to create a bridge to where people should be. They come in and are expected to adapt. Just adapt. Now you are going to go to school and this is the way it is.” They are not able to be ultimately be successful... they don’t go any further. They stop going to school or they don’t do well.*

African students struggle in schools, with the largest African communities faring very poorly – as only one-in-five Somali students are meeting benchmarks (meaning they passed standardized tests), and one-in-three who speak Oromo (from Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia) meeting these benchmarks. On average, 62% of African students are not meeting performance expectations, which in turn places them at high risk of not graduating.



Source: Customized data extraction of ODE data files by Dr. Pat Burk, and analyzed by Myste French, MSW.

While we do not know what happens to youth who struggle, it can be presumed that they are likely to drop out of school. The point of disconnection from education poises them at risk of gang involvement, particularly when coupled with additional social challenges as noted above.

Families also unwittingly can encourage early school leaving – caused by economic strife. Economic necessity for youth to get work exists when parents are unable to find work or find work that pays a living wage. This tightens their economic prospects to levels of permanent poverty: *“it is very hard to see our children forced to choose between their futures and survival and know there is little we can do to protect them when we are suffering so much.”*

The progress of African youth through school is difficult – beginning with placement issues and inadequate supports, and deepened by English language challenges. We look forward to more disaggregation of data, and are eager to see cohort graduation rates, discipline rates, dropout rates, special education and free/reduced lunch information also being shared in this manner. The African community is also interested in tracking these students into post-high school experiences, and to seeing entry into higher education and success in these settings.

### **Literature Review on Risk and Protective Factors for Gang Involvement**

Over the years, risk factors for gang involvement have consolidated around the following categories: (a) individual, (b) family, (c) education, and (d) environmental.<sup>5</sup> Research on gang violence in the USA and Canada has identified risk factors for becoming involved with gangs. While relatively old, the OJJDP has consolidated the risk factors associated with gang membership (Howell, 1998), and their review of gang research shows a set of more than thirty risk factors. The risk factor confirmed by almost all studies is low income. Also prevalent among studies are family risk factors such as coming from a “broken home” and facing housing instability. For youth themselves, their risk of becoming gang involved increases when they are not meaningfully connected to schools or to extracurricular activities, and when they are not working (which influence their income needs, as well as their daily structured activities, and their meaningful connection to others). At a psychological level, youth are at risk when they do not have positive self-esteem (typically achieved by positive school, extracurricular and employment activities), when they do not have strong cultural identities, and when they believe they face positive and optimistic futures (not in evidence in the local region for this community, as illustrated by Curry-Stevens & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2013).

While there has been some historic attention to the dynamics leading African American youth to be gang-involved, it is only in recent years that youth from other backgrounds have been studied in the literature. We are fortunate to have attention to new immigrants and refugees,<sup>6</sup> Latinos,<sup>7</sup> and Vietnamese youth.<sup>8</sup> These insights have been consolidated in numerous studies with key elements summarized here.

**Individual Factors:** An array of factors are included in this domain, tying logically to prior involvement in delinquent acts, aggression, gun ownership, alcohol and drug use, and connections to delinquent peers. At more of a psychological level, risk factors are tied to social difficulties which are theorized as creating a lack of meaningful social connection to positive peers – being hyperactive, defiant, frequently angry, or having deviant attitudes. Connections to more sympathy-inducing psychological traits, youth who have been sexually or physically victimized, punished harshly (corporal punishment or sexual abuse) by their parents, or insufficiently bonded with their parents (as tied to Bowlby’s attachment theory), tend to have low self-esteem and are vulnerable to the messages from gang recruiters that they will be accepted and taken care of. As such, gangs meet a social needs for youth, performing as a surrogate family where acceptance is promised.

An additional feature is the presence/absence of future aspirations. Youth who feel they have something to live for, to protect their future for, and something that effectively affirms them in decisions to walk away from trouble, are more likely to forego temptation today for tomorrow’s future.

This is made more real by obvious chances for a positive future – something that is narrow for African youth.

**Family Factors:** While some are implicitly noted above, additional factors are tied to the quality of one’s relationship with parents (with a good relationship with at least one parent serving to strengthen childhood resilience), the availability of time from parents to monitor and supervise activities (and youth are prone to less violence if supervised closely), and being parented by a single parent. The unfortunate statistic on single parents is that their children are 2-3 times more likely to be delinquent and have conduct problems. Protection against this can be provided through human services – as low income single mothers get support themselves, this increases the quality of parent/child bonds, supports healthier problem solving, and increases life satisfaction for youth.<sup>9</sup>

**School Factors:** Academic failure causes youth to disengage from school, and to lose out on both progress towards a prosperous future, and the connections and daily structures that pull them away from gangs. Impediments to this can be caused by disjointed learning, which is usually the situation for youth who move often (as occurs for the local African community) and who have been in refugee camps with disrupted and frequently ineffective educational supports.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to academic failure, the absence of bonds between teacher and student can push a student out the door. Students with weak ties to teachers, with few role models among the teaching staff, and with negative labeling by teachers (frequently caused by implicit racial bias),<sup>11</sup> are more likely to leave school, and subsequently to be at higher risk for delinquency and, subsequent to that, at higher risk of gang involvement.

**Environmental Factors:** The physical location where one lives is correlated with gang involvement: higher crime areas, higher availability of illegal guns, availability of drugs, and high poverty and residential mobility contributes to gang involvement. And once gangs take hold, they grow in both



number and levels of criminality and violence. The protection from this risk factor is for communities to come together and revitalize deteriorating neighborhoods and work diligently to keep gangs out. Social and economic integration – across economic and racial lines – helps improve the social capital of neighborhoods.

Beyond this, the ability of youth to connect to positive youth development opportunities where they can receive social support is a protective factors. Its absence is a risk factor. Within a positive peer culture, youth have increased resilience to crime.

For youth of color, experiences of racism, racial discrimination and preferential treatment of whites serves to put them at greater risk for gang involvement. The model works as such: the presence of marginality (having a marginal identity such as being of color, deepened when additional marginalized identities are present such as low English skills, and living in poverty) creates stress and strain, and this undermines the youths' bonds with both family and school, and it undermines the typical ways in which social control operates – as embedded in institutions and authority figures such as the police, the justice system, school officials and even parents. When youth experience both racism and acculturation stress as newcomers, there is a tendency for youth to disconnect from even trying to succeed.

It is incumbent on local institutions to respond to racism vigorously. Tough measures are called for<sup>12</sup> through a much more robust approach to racial discrimination and bullying by schools, workplaces, and in public. It is also incumbent on our education systems (both formal and informal) to get content on racial equity into classrooms at early ages. We know that negative racial bias becomes evident by age four,<sup>13</sup> and we increasingly believe that exposure to anti-racism education belongs in primary and middle schools.

**Additional Risk Factors for Newcomer Communities:** Recent research has been done on immigrant experiences in gangs.<sup>14</sup> This research positions newcomer communities as additionally vulnerable due to their social isolation, the newness of their social networks and supports, and the likelihood that both knowledge and language impedes the community's ability to access formal resources. These precipitating factors are exacerbated when youth are not meaningfully connected to schooling or to employment, or if they do not have the ready support of parents (which is more limited in single family homes). In addition, it seems that immigrant youth do not possess what have come to be known as the "immigrant effect" that seems to protect them from negative health and social outcomes.<sup>15</sup> This research also determines that immigrant youth are likely to be over-represented in gangs once they reach the age of 15 years.

The cultural dynamics of social control and internalized adherence to social order are profoundly disrupted by racism. For youth, the impediments for progress are obvious – what's the point in working so hard when you probably won't get ahead anyway? Adherence to social order and respect for the conventions of behavior control are more deeply thwarted with immigration status. One study shows that first generation Latinos are more likely to follow rules and support the value of investing in education. Second generation Latinos have become disillusioned and lower their expectations for their

children to work hard academically. While this can be a damaging stereotype of such families, we caution using this research to presume that Latinos are less interested in academic success. A supplemental lens of arrivals to the USA being full of enthusiasm and high resilience for disadvantage which tends to rub thin by the second generation of their time in the USA.

Focusing back on the refugee experience, the stressors of life in refugee camps can be devastating for families and parenting. Women typically shoulder the considerable burdens of caring for the family and keeping food and water in the home. One researcher portrays the experience as such: “emotional and physical exhaustion and incapacitation among some of the women who had so many responsibilities and burdens were common. In such cases the adult support would collapse and the responsibilities for the family would rest on the shoulders of the young... fear that the camp would be raided... resulted in cumulative stress... individuals lived in a state of chronic stress.”<sup>16</sup>

While such stressors for families are pronounced in refugee camps, they can also exist simply through the stress of immigration for all newcomers, particularly those of color who face deep employment challenges. While researching Vietnamese families, Hong (2010) found that role challenges existed particularly for men. Their breadwinner roles can be deeply eroded in the USA, as they struggle more than women to find work. While often arriving optimistic for the chance to provide well for one’s family, many families experience this as impossible. Men often lose hope for fruitful careers, and feel emasculated. Their wives typically have better luck and gain English skills faster, and this “undermines their role as a household head.”<sup>17</sup> A frequent outcome is a more explosive father who is violent towards their children and spouse. With these tensions, bonds get distant and the youth is more likely to search for gang-based pseudo-familial relationships. While not generally safe to discuss with outsiders, such was hinted at in the process of collecting data for the “Unsettling Profile” African report: it is likely that similar dynamics stretch to the African community.

Like most other race-related research, there is almost complete omission of data related to smaller communities of color involved with gangs. It is with this purpose that this research project emerged, as Africa House – IRCO identified to move beyond an intuited sense that African youth were at risk and becoming involved with gangs at a level of high concern for both parent and service providers.

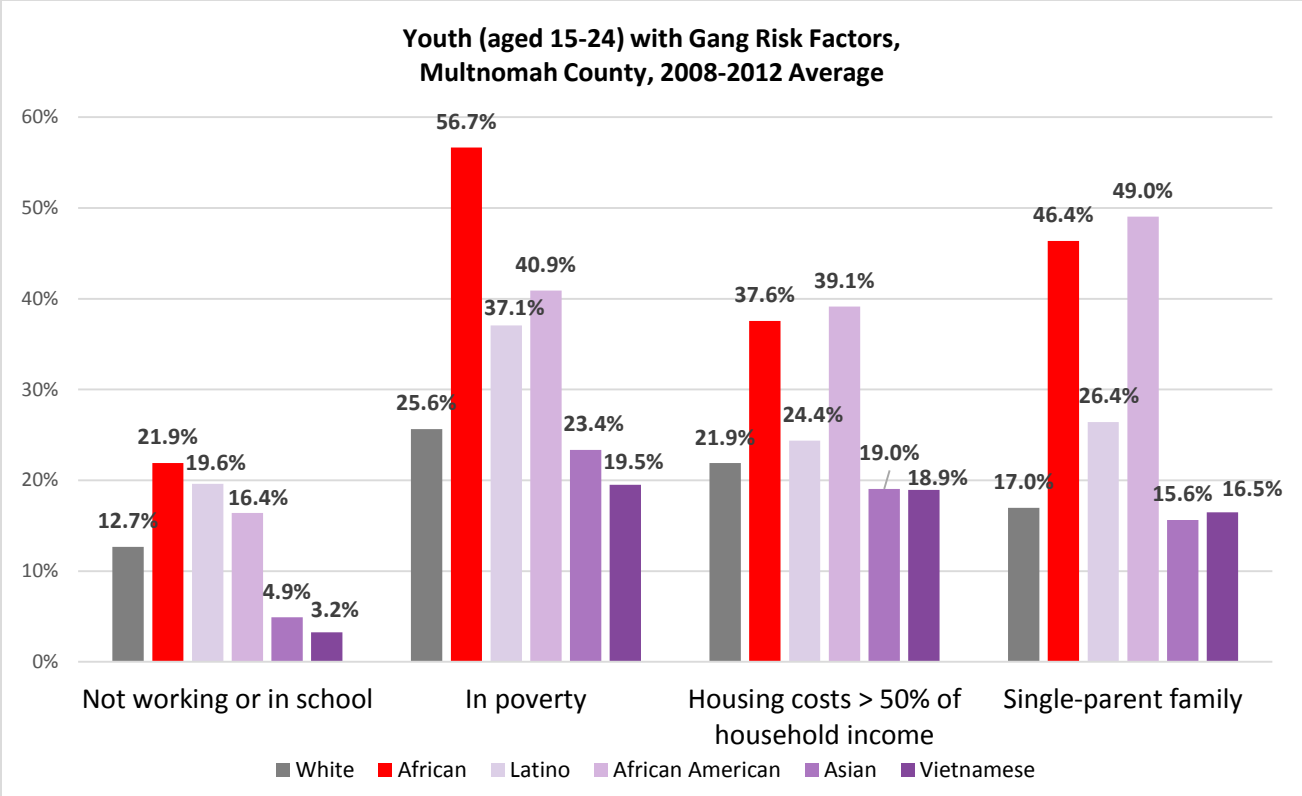
### **How our Local Community Aligns with these Risk Factors**

African youth are at highest risk for becoming gang involved compared with other gang-involved communities. Our research on gang-related risk factors showed that four contributing factors could be “mined” from the American Community Survey for youth in Multnomah County. Selecting the age category for those youth most prominent in gangs in small cities (from 15-24), we were able to explore these youths’ relative risk for gang involvement. Our findings show we should be very concerned about their potential involvement in gangs, and assert that gang prevention programs are warranted to support parents in providing early intervention with their own children, with supports from social service providers when parents perceive they need further supports. The details of our study follow below.

The “hardest” data we were able to track down was the prevalence of some risk factors across the African youth community. Conducting a customized data run of the risk factors facing the community, we find that African youth hold the highest level of risk factors across the communities most involved in gang activity. We selected our comparison groups as those communities which have been determined to have high levels of gang involvement, namely Latino and African American youth, adding the Vietnamese and Asian gangs that are recently coming to the attention to law enforcement and human service staff, which, though lesser, have a profile of gang involvement. We also compare these communities with White youth, as they too are involved with gang, as research shows them to be approximately ¼ of gang membership.<sup>18</sup>

While we would like to have added a more robust set of factors in our data analysis, such as levels of crime in the neighborhood, prior criminal records, drug and alcohol use, and gun ownership, these factors were beyond the scope of this study. The African community is invisible in data sets that might reveal the presence of these risk factors in their lives – the community is subsumed within the larger “Black/African American” identifier and impossible to disaggregate. Such is unfortunate, although we are hopeful to be able to encourage our data systems administrators and policy makers to provide additional measurement variables to support our ability to understand the community’s experiences in the coming years.

Below we share the profile of the prevalence of African youth in our four risk factors: not involved in school or working; living in poverty; being precariously housed (spending more than 50% of the household’s income on housing) and living in a single parent family. The African community holds the highest presence in two of four of these risk factors, and rates very high on those living in single-parent families, and housing instability (as one is deemed to be in unstable housing when one spends more than 30% of income on rent, and we have set the benchmark even higher, at 50% of income).

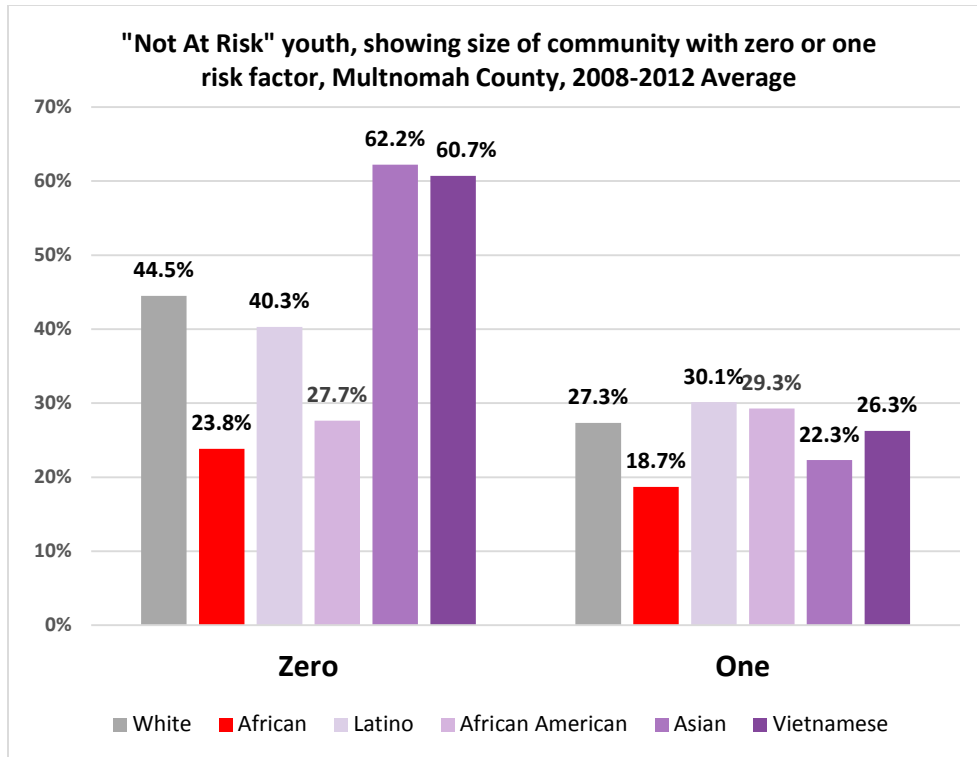


Source: Custom runs of American Community Survey, 2008-2012, provided by ECONorthwest.

We thus interpret that the African youth community is the most vulnerable of our six communities in terms of possessing the worst profile of preponderance of risk factors.

Now we turn to two additional analyses: the portion of the community that is not at risk, having either zero or one risk factors, and the portion of the community that is at high risk, having two or three risk factors. The data quality deteriorates when looking at the size of the community having all four risk factors – because the small sampling numbers in the American Community Survey for the African community render this analysis unreliable. We thus do not include it here.

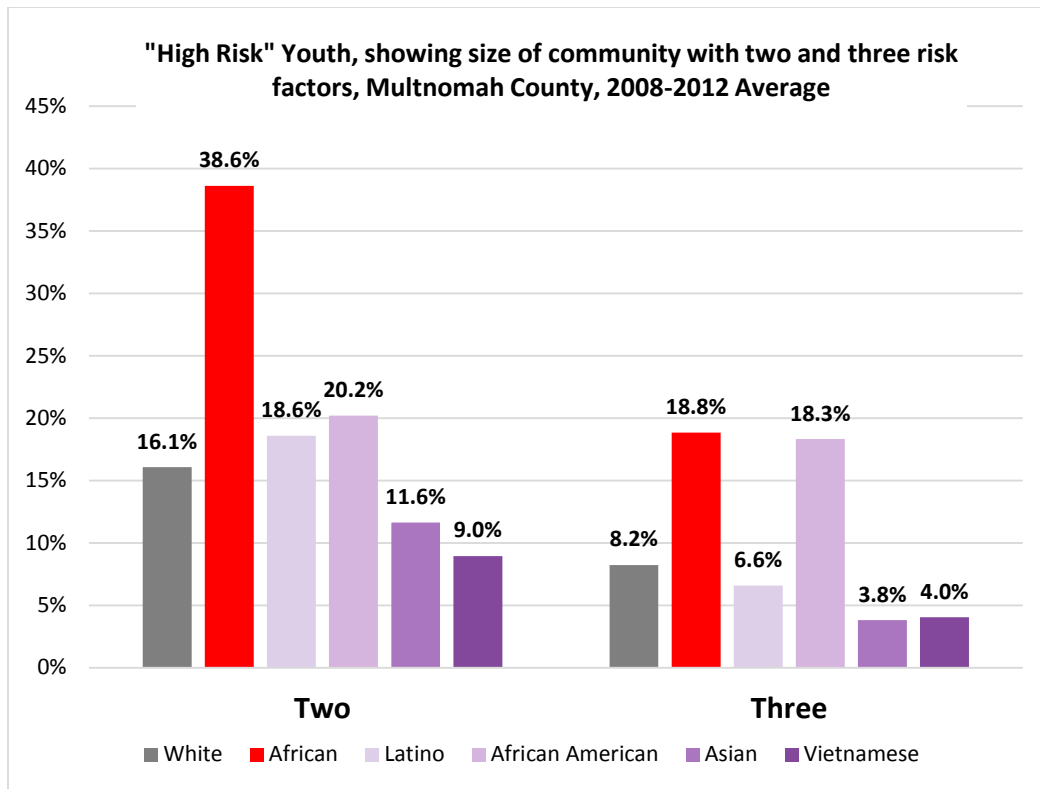
Our first analysis is the number of youth not at risk. Below we see that the African community has the weakest profile of “not at risk” numbers. This is troubling as it suggests that – overall – a relatively imperiled community without a significant portion of the community’s youth not at risk. Obviously there are an abundance of African youth doing wonderful things with their lives, and facing risk factors does not limit everyone in the community, nor does it necessarily prescribe a narrow or limited future for at risk youth. And there is a significant portion of the community (at almost ¼) who do not face any of these challenges.



Source: Custom runs of American Community Survey, 2008-2012, provided by ECONorthwest.

At the same time, however, the African community is least well represented among the community facing no or one risk factor. On that basis, we interpret that there is an additional risk factor introduced when the community is under-represented in low-risk levels as this means, particularly for a small and a new community, that this will limit the size of the community where positive peer relationships, social networks and a well-known set of positive youth spaces with which to connect. The absence of such history will pose challenges for community members.

Finally, we look at the number of youth who possess two and three risk factors for gang involvement. In both categories, African youth have the most significant profile among those with high risk levels. Among those with at least two risk factors, African youth face doubly high presence over Latinos, and more than triple the levels of African Americans. The risk levels among these variables for both the Asian and Vietnamese youth is very low.



Source: Custom runs of American Community Survey, 2008-2012, provided by ECONorthwest.

In summary, the best “hard data” that is currently available to us – region-specific, African specific, comparative data on risk factors – shows us that the African community faces the worst profile of risk factors, facing over-representation in high risk factors for gang involvement, under-representation among those who face few risk factors, and precipitously high levels of presence of those holding two risk factors, and very high levels of those holding three risk factors. Overall, African youth in Multnomah County, on the basis of these data, have a profile of involvement in risk factors that should raise alarm bells for all of us. This is a community in urgent need of supports and resources. When we also notice that this is a newcomer community with a high level of refugees within, these same youth additionally face risk factors on the basis of their newcomer status, their history of trauma as refugees, and as outsiders without established community networks and resources in the local region.

### Insights from Local Leaders, and African Leaders around the Nation

#### *What have we heard about African youth gang involvement?*

African community parents are proud of the accomplishments of their youth – just like parents in other communities – in language acquisition, in academics, and in business. Parents and leaders most often cite education as paramount for African youth to achieve success in their new country. A group of successful youth (some who had earned scholarships to college) gathered for the Africa House Youth Leadership Conference and echoed their parents’ beliefs about education as the route to the success of

African youth. When asked about wishes for all African youth, many of their survey responses (33%) emphasized education:

- *“Hope (for) them to have a better life, to live and always to have an education in their mind all of the time”*
- *“Affordable college education”*
- *“Education and success”*
- *“Better education and more help with school in the future especially for those who speak English as a second language”*
- *“To succeed in their education”*
- *“To put their education first”*
- *“I hope for them to get good education”*
- *“Better education and better jobs”*

Cultural pride is an additional factor that is desirable for a positive future, as it is tied to positive racial identity<sup>19</sup> and in turn becomes a protective factor keeping youth unlikely to join gangs. Youth at this forum also wished that all African youth could understand their cultural background, *“love ourselves and be proud of where we came from”* and they could take advantage of the opportunities in this country.

African leaders and community members often spoke of the great opportunity for their youth to succeed in America but also recognized the potential for intense challenges for some youth. A community outreach worker warned:

*This is the greatest country with opportunities for freedom ... to become anything you want to be or become "your greatest nightmare"... to become the worst person ever that you wouldn't even think of in Africa.*

At the same time that African community outreach workers have witnessed growing gang presence in their neighborhoods and schools, isolated youth who feel they do not belong at school end up on the street. Parents worry about youth who are swayed by American friends to be more like them, to disconnect from their cultural identity, and to ignore elders and community. Ultimately they are in danger of *“losing their wisdom.”*

African leaders spoke of immigrant and refugee families, suffering from trauma resulting from lengthy stays in refugee camps or resettlement from war-torn countries and that they have no culturally appropriate counseling services in Multnomah County. These families may be headed by single moms and dealing with poverty, unemployment or multiple low wage jobs, and living in neighborhoods with high levels of gang activity who recruit the unsupervised, vulnerable youth. An outreach worker describes parents as caring deeply for their children but frequently without the ability to meaningfully guide them. The worker stated they do not understand youth challenges and their need to identify and belong. He explained that these overwhelmed parents sometimes do not understand how to communicate with their youth about their challenges or successes and they do not celebrate their

youths' efforts and achievements enough. Without such explicit support, the internal strength and fortitude of African youth to stay in school and on a positive path is reduced.

Despite the absence of data from the justice system (and other African-specific pieces of evidence about risk and incidence of gang involvement – at least until this study), African community leaders fully believe that their youth are faring badly. They expressed the fear that they are “*losing our kids to the juvenile detention system.*” Concerns about the future of some African youth and their involvement with gangs have provided the impetus for IRCO’s Africa House to consider programs to prevent youth involvement with crime and gangs.

### ***Risk Factors for African Youth***

This section documents the perceptions of all those who participated in this study regarding how African youth are at high risk of gang involvement. It is a unique narrative borne of the combination of being a newcomer community, one where parents struggle to effectively support their children, and being one that is educationally and economically barred from fully inclusion and success. It is a narrative that gives rise to the need for culturally-specific programing to work effectively with local African youth.

When discussing youth gang involvement, African community leaders, key informants, and parents most often stated the challenges that African youth face with the rapid transition from refugee camps where youth have had little to no access with education to under-resourced U.S. schools where they cannot get help. Often, frustrated youth with limited English language skills and limited schooling cannot meet academic expectations for their age group. Key informants talk about these youth feeling like they do not belong and drop out of school.

Fighting at school (often instigated by racist insults and bullying) leads to suspensions and/or expulsion. The disproportionate amount of disciplinary actions involving youth of color in Multnomah County have been reported in several reports,<sup>20,21</sup> although we have no such data to confirm this as yet.

Troubled youth stop doing homework, stop attending church with the family, and stay out late, sometimes not returning home for several days without parental permission. Some youth get kicked out by their beleaguered parents who feel like they have lost control of their children. Cultural disconnects such as unexpected pregnancies, not obeying parents, fighting with parents, violence, and moving away from traditional practices such as separation of the genders until marriage will sometimes induce parents to cast out youth from the home.

Community outreach workers have witnessed or have been told about youth involved with prostitution, smoking, using drug and selling drugs, stealing, fighting, and guns. Outreach workers have noticed an upsurge in expensive personal electronics like iPads and smart phones which have not been purchased by the parents. When parents have asked their children how they acquired the electronic gadgets the youth lie and say that they were gifts from friends or handed out at school. Parents who have little interaction with schools or families outside of the community accept the information without checking.



Homelessness within the African community although hard to see from outside the community is also pushing youth onto the streets, as described poignantly by a community leader:

*“Homelessness in our community - you don’t see African homeless on the street but we have so many African families that are homeless. Because the parents are homeless the kids are so frustrated. There is no place stable enough for them to continue their education, they end up on the streets, join gangs...looking for the easy way to make money.”*

### **Recruitment Methods**

Youth who end up on the streets – by virtue of not being in school or youth programs, being kicked out or running away from home, lack of parental or family supervision (due to demands of low wage jobs that force parents to work multiple jobs or night hours), or being homeless – are targeted as vulnerable by gang members. Although most outreach workers think that youth in middle-school and high-school are most likely to get involved with gangs, youth as young as 9 years old are observed wearing gang-affiliated clothing, been involved with criminal activity, and seen late at night in the cars of known gang members.

African youth are exposed to gangs through friends and family who are gang members, in schools, on neighborhood streets, on playgrounds, in sporting arenas, and over social media. The Portland Police report the presence of nationally reported and local gangs in many of the neighborhoods where African families have been resettled in the Portland area. However the extent of African youth gang involvement is difficult to assess as immigrant origin data of gang members or youth involved in criminal activity is not collected (reported by a Portland police official).

Several community outreach workers talked about recruitment at basketball courts or soccer fields when youth gathered to play games. Gang members may bring a dog to the park to attract youth and create an opportunity to talk to them. Gang members then recruit by promising much – and tend to emphasize the promise of security and social connection. Recruiters may begin by telling a vulnerable boy that he can belong to a group who will care for him, protect him and provide for him. Girls are recruited for sex trafficking with similar promises of love, care, protection and money from pimps who then obtain continued acquiescence by threatening her family’s safety. When these features are missing in a youth’s life, they are more susceptible in being drawn into a gang.

One youth told a trusted community worker that he was getting phone calls at home by a neighbor who said he just wanted to compliment him but the youth noticed that the neighbor had not asked him to do anything wrong. The community worker explained that the neighbor was a gang member and the young boy should be careful about who he befriended as the requests for criminal activity would surely follow. Some very poor youth who are looking for “easy money” will be agree to deliver a drug package and then will be threatened with violence on the youth and his family if they refuse to join the gang. Other youth may be bullied at school or assaulted by youth gang members and forced to join a gang.

Gang members recruiting in sporting areas in parks have formed “teams” and require training meetings late at night with threats to strike out against family members if the youth misses any meetings. Another community youth worker was shocked when interrupted during her discussion with an African youth on the playground one day as a gang member chastised the boy about having missed a meeting during the previous night as the boy shook with fear.

An outreach worker reported that gang presence is ubiquitous in the schools and on the playgrounds. He has observed that gang members cluster in racial/ethnic groupings (African American, Latino, Asian, or White) but some gangs welcome multiple ethnicities and multiple gangs of a single ethnicity may cluster around a particular territory and war over territory. In addition to unique clothing, colors, and tattoos, some African men wear dreadlocks (unusual for African men) to signify their gang affiliation. Youth who want to demonstrate their desire to join a gang will check social media as a resource for gang related clothing, colors, and signals (like buckles turned to the right) to be worn on specific days.

Most key informants noted that African youth were being recruited into established national and local gangs. When asked about whether community leaders were seeing gang activity in their neighborhoods one leader said that gang involvement started in small ways like harassing neighbors and would often lead to more serious problems:

*“Starts with little things. Start abusing and harassing the neighborhood – like ‘F’ words. The next time a little bit more. Comes in a group – 2 or 3. If we don’t start earlier with programs to know why they are doing this. What’s behind it? We can talk to parents. Before they go to the police. We need to be involved as a community.”*

Leaders recommended the community come together to create solutions for reaching troubled youth and supporting the families with IRCO and the schools as focal points. The need to address youth problems and family issues were evident in the urgency of their statements:

*“Have a liaison. Liaisons to keep information confidential between family and IRCO. Liaise between students and school. They can resolve family issue programs. School is the bottom line. Unless we keep children in school, then they will be in gangs.”*

*“We have so many kids selling drugs on the streets. Parents willing them to do that because it is fast money. Create program willing to help to identify which kids. We thought we have freedom but we don’t. We don’t understand and we don’t have that in our culture. Program for all schools.”*

The insights gathered for this study provide the beginnings of an astute framework concerning the vulnerability of youth – and subsequently provide insights about how to build up the protective factors that can reduce risk of gang involvement. They also provide insight about how to create programs that are likely to be supported by parents and community leaders, and that are likely to get at the root of the problem of vulnerability. This is a community that has never previously been afforded the chance to

come together to explore this issue with any sense of conviction that resources might be provided to help them build better futures for their children. This is also a community deeply invested in finding such solutions, fueled by urgency and by a rawness and newness about this issue. It is a community that can benefit by creating a structure that supports their ongoing involvement in building, overseeing and being involved in continuous quality improvement – assuming there is funding for such work.

### **Listening to parents... What are their fears? Their insights? Their advice?**

Parents say they are overwhelmed with youth behavioral problems when youth are constantly exposed to behaviors that conflict with their traditional culture and do whatever they want. Parents talked often about how U.S. culture conflicts with their traditional African culture and that has raised many concerns for the parents.

In their children's growing relationships with American youth, the parents can see problems already starting and signs of more problems to come. Traditionally youth would have been home until they were 18. The girls would have been in the kitchen learning and helping. The boys would have been prepared for marriage by consulting with elders. Since resettling in the U.S., African girls have boyfriends - "*here everyone has to have boyfriends.*" African youth have become attached to computers, phones and Facebook. Boys have stopped going to church.

Parents fear that smart phones and Facebook have taken that place of elders as youth can find out whatever knowledge they seek on the computer. African parents who place a very high value on youth completing their education, fear that students with accessibility to computers and Facebook within the schools will be distracted by social media and that the distraction will result in detrimental impacts to their school achievement.

American friends provide information and play the role of teacher of the newcomer. Parents feel that their youth are learning "*bad things ... the bad culture*" from their American friends. A mother spoke of her fears that American friends were discouraging her daughter against following traditional practice by repeatedly asking why she was going to church every day. American friends have advised African youth to call the police and report parents for physical abuse.

Parents report that American friends encourage African children to enter their homes when the parents are not present and use the family computer to access Facebook. Parents have seen troubling messages sent when they are not home to supervise and have found that youth are sometimes accessing pornography and other sites that concern parents.

Then parents say that they witness African youth change their behavior from "*good to bad*" especially concerning girlfriends and boyfriends. One mother talked about her daughter's friends saying that she has a bad mother because the mother restricted her daughter's activities ("*won't let her daughter do what she (the daughter) wants*"). And parents suspect sexual activity with contacts made through Facebook.

Parents fear that African youth who adopt American culture, clothing, behaviors, and language will lose touch with their own African culture “they will lose their wisdom” and “stop going to church.”

African parents in our focus group said “We need help... with teaching.” They (and some community leaders) asked for programs that would support and reinforce traditional knowledge and cultural beliefs for youth in meetings at least every three months (or as often as possible). Parents described their struggles with their youth who are constantly exposed to conflicting ideals:

*“Whenever they meet kids to remind them of our culture because the American culture is destroying them. I have one 13-year old who is telling me every day that he will reach 18 years old – meaning that when he reaches 18 he won’t be there in that house. Instead I am over 40... I still have my mom; I know that I should live with my mom. But here kids are taught that when you reach 18 you are not part of that house anymore.”*

*“Maybe they will find that what parents are telling us at home and what we are told here – they are matching ... similar. But if we are just telling them over there and they are just getting knowledge outside they don’t listen to us and they don’t take it as serious as it should be.”*

In addition to a program for reinforcing cultural beliefs and traditions with youth, parents also recommended:

- Workshops to discuss the consequences for youth who call the police to intervene in family disputes.
- Parent workshops about resources and programs for helping with children who have become unmanageable; help with behavior.
- Summer employment for youth
- Organized soccer or basketball leagues.

### Recommendations for change

The expressed concerns within the African community and requests for help to save their troubled youth are compelling reasons for creating community based and culturally appropriate programming. Programming to address youth involvement in gangs, through prevention and intervention that includes coalitions of community, parents, and schools will have the most far-reaching impacts. Parents want to learn about how to recognize the signs of gang involvement and where to find help addressing troubling youth behavior. Programming that encourages youth to celebrate their cultural identity while building skills to achieve academically in school will ensure that more of them join the ranks of most African youth as future community leaders.

Program recommendations were discussed with great urgency and with little prompting by all who were interviewed or attended focus groups, signaling the concerns of the community. The recommendations fell into three categories with the central goal of strengthening and reinforcing cultural tradition with African youth (both in the prevention and intervention arenas), for parents of troubled youth, and community level efforts.

### Supports Prioritized by the African Community

- Organized activities and clubs: such as soccer and basketball (African specific teams); academic clubs, mentoring programs, job placement workshops, internship programs, college preparation workshops.
- Programs that promote strong cultural identity, respect for elders, and community involvement.
- Gender-specific programs (culturally appropriate) for students to encourage education and social life.
- Programs to build greater understanding of the legal system and consequences of criminal activity.
- Culturally-informed workshops to support and communicate with African youth about challenges they may face in U.S. schools.
- On-going youth groups to talk confidentially about problems and solutions in the community.
- Dedicated counselor attached to Africa House to work specifically with troubled youth
- Annual Youth Conference for all African youth to come together and talk about all of that is happening in the community.
- Community, parents, and school collaborations for building African cultural knowledge within schools.
- Collaboration of parents, school, and community to work on youth intervention and supports rather than disciplinary expulsion/suspension.
- Greater presence of African outreach workers in schools (as liaisons) with high populations of African students.
- African community-based counsellors who can work on reconciliation and relationship building between parents and troubled youth.
- Financial aid for families struggling against poverty and low wage jobs.

The following recommendations are drawn from community suggestions and integrate examples of national best practices models (referenced when available). They are organized according the elements that seem to be most relevant for prevention and for intervention programs.

### Prevention Program Options

- Develop programming for youth that provides year-round organized soccer or basketball leagues.
- Collaborate with other organizations to develop job clubs that explore summer employment and internships for youth. See a Promising Practices program example called *Youth Career and Leadership Development*.<sup>22</sup>
- Implement workshops to discuss the consequences for youth who call the police to intervene in family disputes.
- Parent workshops about resources and approaches for developing relationships with children who have become unmanageable and provide supports to strengthen parenting options to help with behavior. See the Strengthening and Preserving our Families in Transition (SPOFIT)<sup>23</sup> and the Strengthening Families Program.<sup>24</sup>

- Culturally responsive counseling services that address trauma for parents and youth.<sup>23</sup>
- Create a collaborative of community leaders, parents, and youth to advise the development and design of appropriate local programming like the *West African Teen Outreach Program (WATOP)* a Promising Practices<sup>25</sup> model program that helps refugee students who need to catch up with their grade level.

### Intervention Program Options

- Workshops for recognizing youth gang involvement and resources for help.
- Collaboration of parents, school, and community to work on youth intervention and supports rather than disciplinary expulsion/suspension.
- Greater presence of African outreach workers in schools (as liaisons) with high populations of African students.
- African community-based counsellors who can work on reconciliation and relationship building between parents and troubled youth.<sup>23</sup>
- Create a collaborative of community leaders, parents, and youth to investigate the potential of developing a culturally appropriate local program like *The Cure Violence Health*<sup>26</sup> in Chicago which engages the entire community to interrupt gang violence in their neighborhoods.

### Resources Requested by the Community

These are suggested printed materials that can be developed to share continuously with newcomers as needed.

- Workshops about how to recognize early signs of possible gang involvement with youth.
- Communication about culturally-based resources (education, case management, counselling, and print and web-based resources) available
- Assistance in understanding the legal system and how to navigate effective advocacy for their children
- Education for parents that provides information about newcomer integration, picking up where the Refugee Orientation ends. Emphasis desired on building job skills, housing resources, English language acquisition, and employment resources.
- Collaborate with parents to develop culturally specific and locally based resources for parents on the signs of gang involvement and where to go for help. As an example, see the *Parents Guide to Gangs* from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention pamphlet.<sup>27</sup>
- Collaborate with parents and community members to produce a list of relevant resources that can support the emergence of a full spectrum of interventions. Include sections on culturally specific counseling (for youth and family), gang prevention program design (including gang prevention task force officers, school intervention specialists, and community outreach workers) and gang intervention program information (likely to include the above and extend to include mandated juvenile justice programs).
- Share this research report with the community, parents, and youth (especially those who contributed their wisdom to the research) and request feedback about representation, recommendations, and shared vision.

### Implementation Imperatives

Collaboration between community, parents and schools in the development, design, and delivery of the programs are critical for the success and sustainability of these efforts, and for the community's wellbeing. This is a community struggling to understand and they have articulated the need to build shared insights into the needs and priorities of their children and youth, and to build skills in doing such work. Implementation is advised as follows:

1. Create a second research study that will lead to the creation of a program model that reflects the best of the literature and of the community's insights. It is advised that such a study would be operated as a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project, thus integrating community leaders and parents into the structure of the initiative in a substantial and ongoing way.
2. Once operational, have the program overseen by a Community Advisory Board (or subcommittee of a Board of Directors) that is comprised of interested community members who were part of the CBPR study. This would provide for them the ability to build expertise and confidence in this issue, and to build their capacity as advocates to move more expansively into advocacy work and upstream practice that would lessen the distress in the African community. It would serve as a significant leadership development opportunity, and simultaneously ground the initiatives in the wisdom of the community.

### Data Systems Reforms Needed

Building standardized and culturally-responsive data systems is essential for continuing to support the community's visibility and for understanding its strengths and challenges. Voluntary implementation of the racial identifiers used in House Bill 2134 is advocated. We also advocate for data systems that identify when clients and service users are refugees, as this opens the possibility of early identification of issues related to trauma and related vulnerabilities. These recommendations are contained within the *"Research Protocol"* published with the Coalition of Communities of Color.<sup>28</sup>

### Synthesis and Closing

This is the first time the local African community (parents, youth, leaders, and service providers) has had the opportunity to share thoughts and perspectives of both their fears for their children and their thoughts on what would strengthen their futures. The community was full of passion and insight into elements for moving forward, and we have amplified the value of including their participation in an ongoing way.

In our opinion, based on the needs of the community and the risk factors it faces – highest of any of the communities already served locally or nationally by culturally-specific programming – it is time to introduce funding for an African-specific gang prevention and intervention program. The pathway forward provides an important opportunity for the development of local African leaders, bringing forward parents and service providers into these roles, and working collaboratively to determine the design elements needed for such work.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> That report is available for free viewing and downloading at the website of the Coalition of Communities of Color, [www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org](http://www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org). The report's citation is as follows: Curry-Stevens, A. & Coalition of Communities of Color (2013). *The African immigrant and refugee community in Multnomah County: An unsettling profile*. Portland, OR: Portland State University
- <sup>2</sup> House Bill 2034, that creates race, ethnicity, language and disability demographic data collection standards.
- <sup>3</sup> The data, information and analysis in this section is drawn from the following report: Curry-Stevens, A. & Coalition of Communities of Color (2013). *The African immigrant and refugee community in Multnomah County: An unsettling profile*. Portland, OR: Portland State University. Because the lead author of that report is also an author of this report, she is able to draw from the same datasets, providing additional customizing for this report.
- <sup>4</sup> P.11 in Ingram, H. & Schneider, A. (2005). Introduction. In *Public policy and the social construction of deservedness*, pp.1-28. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
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