



Take Action Mon Valley (TAMV) as a Model for Supporting Black Women and their Families

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Overview

Take Action Mon Valley (TAMV) is a nonprofit community organization that works outside Pittsburgh in Allegheny County, PA. They unapologetically work against all forms of community violence through activism and organizing. In their view, there are direct forms of interpersonal violence such as bullying, sexual violence or homicides and robberies; forms of neighborhood violence such as gang and police shootings; as well as less visible forms of structural racism that adversely affect the mental, cultural, and economic structure of a community.

The Pittsburgh Foundation reached out to Ceres Policy Research to provide TAMV assistance with their data collection and analysis. In response, Ceres consolidated multiple google sheets from TAMV into one spreadsheet and then analyzed the data.

We assessed data on their community programming, community complaints/victim advocacy and their COVID-19 crisis and mutual aid programming. Overall we found that TAMV provides crucial legal and financial support for people within their community, particularly over the past year and a half when people lost jobs and day care due to COVID-19. We present our more detailed findings below.

Program Participants

There were 365 unique individuals who accessed programs at TAMV between 2018 and 2021. These people varied across gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

- 82% of program participants were women, 17% were men, and just under 1% reported having a gender non-binary or transgender gender identity.
- 78% of program participants identify as Black or African American and 3.4% identify as Latino with the rest identifying as White.
- 52% of program participants are Black women, a primary target of TAMV funding.



- 1% of participants are teenagers from the age of 13-18, 19.5% of participants are transitional age youth from 19-24, 49.6% are young adults age 25-39, and 15.9% are seniors 65+. (The rest of participants are age 40-65).

Program Participation

Ceres reviewed participation in six different programs: transportation assistance, a Christmas gift box program, a turkey giveaway, rent relief, participation in a youth panel, and legal assistance.

There were only a handful of participants on the youth panel and the Christmas gift box program. 124 people participated in the Turkey Giveaway and 57 people received rental assistance. We provide detailed information about the transportation assistance and response to violence below because these efforts took the most time.

- *COVID/Transportation Assistance.* The TAMV transportation assistance program provided \$40 per month to help people attend medical appointments, get to the grocery store or pick up food at food drives. Participants could apply more than once, but had to register each month.

Ceres found that 169 unique individuals received money from this program. 95 people participated in this program once, 29 people used the program twice, 31 people used the program three times, 6 people used the program four times, and 8 people used the program between five and eleven times.

The rides were split evenly between medical and food needs. 123 of people used the assistance for rides to attend medical appointments and 118 of people used the assistance for rides to pick up food or groceries.

In addition to transportation assistance, TAMV asked people about how COVID was impacting their lives. 143 people reported losing wages, 159 people reported losing their job, and 125 people reported experiencing challenges with daycare.

- *Assistance Responding to Violent Experiences.* TAMV reports that 65% of the work that they do is providing this type of assistance. This type of work is time consuming but also rewarding because it builds strong relationships between people across the community.

Ceres found that 34 people received support with an incident related to interpersonal, neighborhood, or state-sanctioned violence. In one case, there was racist graffiti on the side of a building. Over ten incidents involved police. Most of the reports about police involved violent overreactions--such as shooting to kill. There were a handful, however, that involved underreactions to Black people by police. For example, in one case, one young girl was punched in the head and called "n----r" by a white man. When the police arrived, the white man was only issued a citation rather than being arrested for assault.

However, most cases involved more than one form of violence. For example, one case involved excessive violence by police in the arrest of two Black girls on a school bus. Since the police pulled the hair of one of the girls, they were engaged in interpersonal violence. Since they were police, it was a form of state-sanctioned neighborhood violence. And since the police would probably act differently if the girls were white, this is a form of structural racism.

In response to people seeking support, TAMV often links people to resources such as an attorney or mental health services. In one case, they helped families pay water bills. However, TAMV always organizes the community to take action against systems such as the police or school or business owners who have caused harm; sets up meetings to discuss the harm that has been caused; and lobbies for a change in policy or procedure to prevent the incident from happening again. For example, in response to the two girls being violently arrested on the school bus, TAMV organized various calls to action, connected the families with an attorney, attended school board and council meetings to advocate for the families, provided court support, linked family to mental health counseling, and is looking into legal action against the police department.

The most common locations that TAMV received community complaints for violent acts are McKeesport (n=10). Duquesne and West Mifflin had the next highest amounts. People also reported incidents in Tarentum, Churchill, North Versailles, Duquesne University, Wilkinsburg, Pleasant Hills, Downtown Pittsburgh, Homestead, East Pittsburgh, Braddock and Penn Hills.

16 of these 34 cases have been closed while 18 remain open.



Are there particular groups that have been supported more than others?

Ceres reviewed the data to see if there were particular groups that benefitted more than others from TAMV services.

Based on our analysis, Ceres found that transitional age youth (TAY) were impacted by COVID-19 more than others. 70% of TAY youth experienced a loss in wages compared with 31% of others; 80% of TAY youth reported losing their jobs compared with 34% of others, and 74% of TAY youth reported having childcare challenges compared with 24% of others. This suggests that TAMV is well-suited to serve this population--a group that has been identified as a priority population by many foundations and social service agencies across the country.

In addition, our analysis shows that TAMV is particularly well suited to address the complex experiences of the Black community. Their transportation and rental assistance programs provided crucial resources for Black families experiencing financial instability during COVID-19. Black people have historically been the first to experience under and unemployment during financially difficult times. With so many Black people losing jobs and include and day care over the past year and a half, these programs helped keep families connected to medical care and food.

And TAMV soars in their work supporting Black families experiencing interpersonal, neighborhood, and structural violence. As discussed above, the cases that come to TAMV usually involve multiple forms of violence at once. There were cases of discrimination in the workplace or places of business that started as structural violence and escalated into personal violence. And there were jarring cases of police shootings and over-reactive arrests that exhibited interpersonal, neighborhood, and structural violence all at once. While some of the cases were linked to violence against Black men and boys, the majority of people coming to TAMV are Black mothers and grandmothers seeking assistance for their families. For this reason, TAMV serves as a special resource specifically for Black women.

Conclusion

Based on our analysis of TAMV data, Ceres finds that the organization provided crucial financial and emotional support to people--particularly Black people--living in Mon Valley. This is particularly true over the last year and a half during COVID.

TAMV additionally serves as a unique resource for Black women whose families are experiencing interpersonal, neighborhood, and structural violence. In most of the cases that come to TAMV, Black families have been wronged by the very agencies--police departments or schools--that are supposed to help them. As a result, Black mothers and grandmothers may not have anywhere else to turn to. TAMV is not only an invaluable resource for people in Allegheny County, they serve as a model that should be replicated elsewhere.