

Solutions to the Causes: Taking action on upstream causes

Goal: Participants identify possible solutions from their Causes of the Causes (root cause) diagrams.

Objectives: By the end of this lesson plan, participants will be able to:

- Discuss the meaning of the “babies in the river” story
- List two potential solutions for each place on the river
- Discuss the challenges of taking action upstream
- List potential partners for collaboration

Materials:

- Worksheet (see below) or draw on blank piece of paper
- Colored pens / pencils

Time Required: ~ 1 hour (depends on the number of participants, with everyone sharing their diagram)

Background: How can you identify the solutions to the root causes?

This exercise has become a JHA standard as a follow-up activity to “Causes of the Causes”. We use it when a participant, work group, community or organization wants to take action on a problem and they are thinking through possible solutions. We have found that many participants do not thoroughly explore or discuss how taking on action on solutions higher upstream can be more effective in reducing health disparities and promoting health equity.

We start the exercise by telling the “Babies in the River” parable. This parable is told in many different ways to teach different lessons. The public health world uses it to distinguish between the work that they do (prevention) and what doctors do (treatment). Community organizers use it to discuss fighting the oppressors who are throwing the babies in the river. We tell the story pretty quickly and simply as an introduction to the exercise and to ask the root cause question “WHY?”

We have conducted this exercise at all age levels and on all types of problems with many different sized groups. Examples of problems and solutions included below are: “Jason in the hospital”; “Asthma prevalence in South Park”; “Problems with my weight”; and “Why is Maria back in urgent care?”

Preparation for the teacher/facilitator:

- “Causes of the Causes”: This exercise assumes that “Causes of the Causes” has already been taught. You need to have the “Causes” diagrams available to proceed with this exercise.
- Babies in the River parable: Stephen Mayer, http://effectivecommunities.com/pdfs/ECP_SavingBabies.pdf
(Note: many other sources online. Feel free to explore)

Facilitator instructions:

1. Causes of the Causes:

Prompt: What did we learn from our “Causes of the Causes” diagram/s?

2. Babies in the river parable:

Prompt: Is everyone familiar with the “babies in the river” parable? (Note: If someone raises their hand, let them tell the story, and you can add to the finer points).

- Once upon a time, there was a man and a woman having a picnic next to a river.
- Suddenly, they gasp because they see a baby floating down the river.
- They jump in to save the baby.
- But another baby comes floating down.
- They jump in and save that one too.
- And then more babies come floating down.
- They pull babies from the river all afternoon long and are completely exhausted.
- Finally, the woman starts walking up the river.
- The man says: “hey, where are you going? We need to save these babies”
- The woman says: “I am going up upstream to find out WHY the babies are being thrown in in the first place.”

Prompts:

What do you think this story means?

Why do you think I am telling you this story?

3. Solutions to the Causes

Prompt: So now that we have learned about the root causes, it’s time to think about solutions to these problems or how we might take action upstream. We are going to use our “Causes of the Causes” diagram in conjunction with the “Solutions to the Causes” river worksheet below. (Note: the river can alternatively just be drawn on a piece of paper). Using your “Causes of the Causes” diagram, circle 3-4 “causes” that you think are important for you as an individual or organization. Then brainstorm some potential solutions to each particular problem. Then refer to the stream diagram and think about where the solutions fit on the stream. There are no right or wrong solutions. See the examples below.

4. Share diagram/s

Depending on situation, these diagrams can be shared in pairs, small groups, or as a large group.

Prompts:

- What makes the upstream ones harder to do?
- What are some ways that you could partner with other agencies, groups, organizations to achieve a solution?
- How might you (as an individual or an organization) work with a community on these issues?

Extension

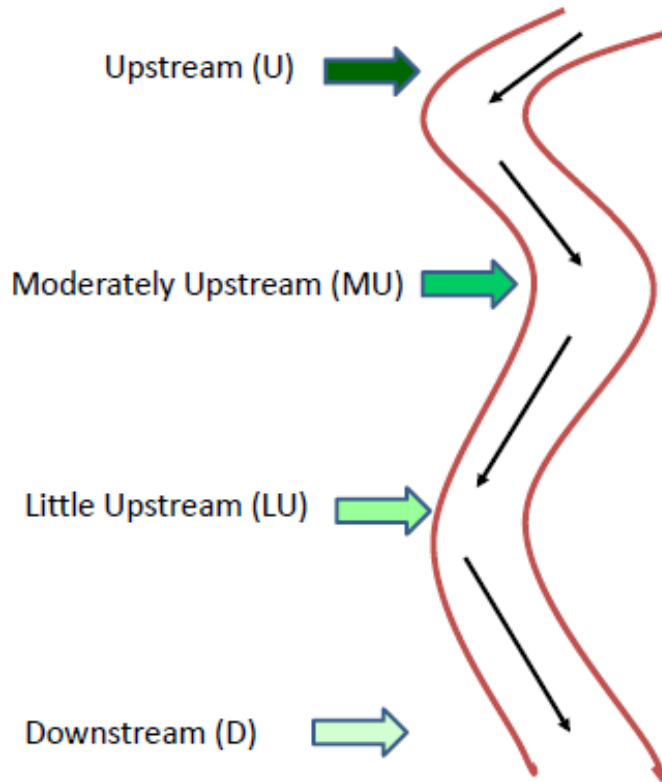
5. Action Project

An individual, group, workshop, or organization can conduct both “Causes and the Causes” and “Solutions to the Causes” for an issue that they want to address. (See examples below.) Participants can discuss the viability of a chosen solution by reviewing their own strategic plan, using consensus based tools, etc. JHA often has our participants conduct a SWOT analysis to explore whether their action is achievable.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis. There are multiple examples on the web.

Where on the river does the action go?

Using the causes that you circled from your causal diagram, think of some action ideas up and down the river

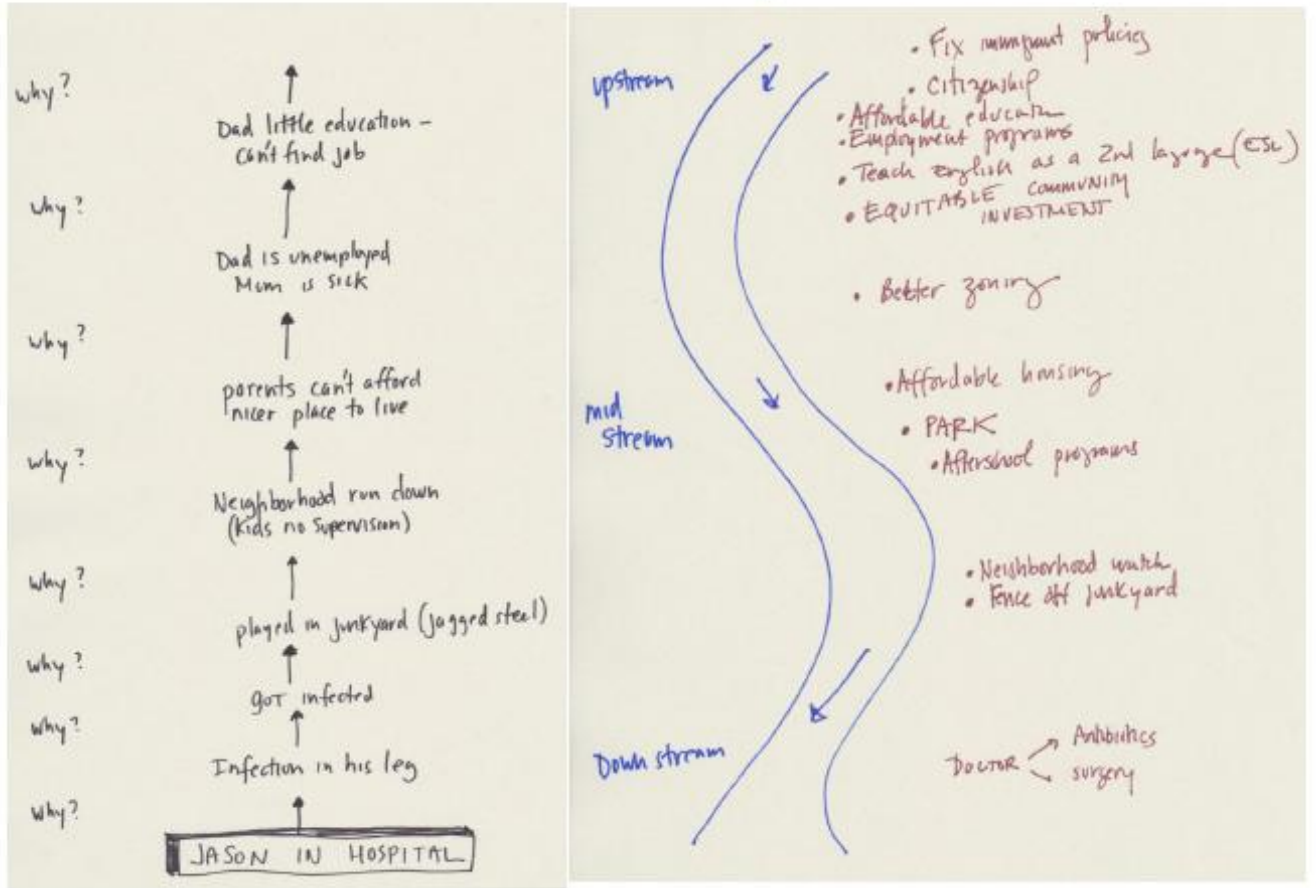


Jason in the Hospital (Health Corps volunteers, 2014-2015, Seattle, WA)
 From the "Jason in the Hospital" poem¹

JASON: CAUSES



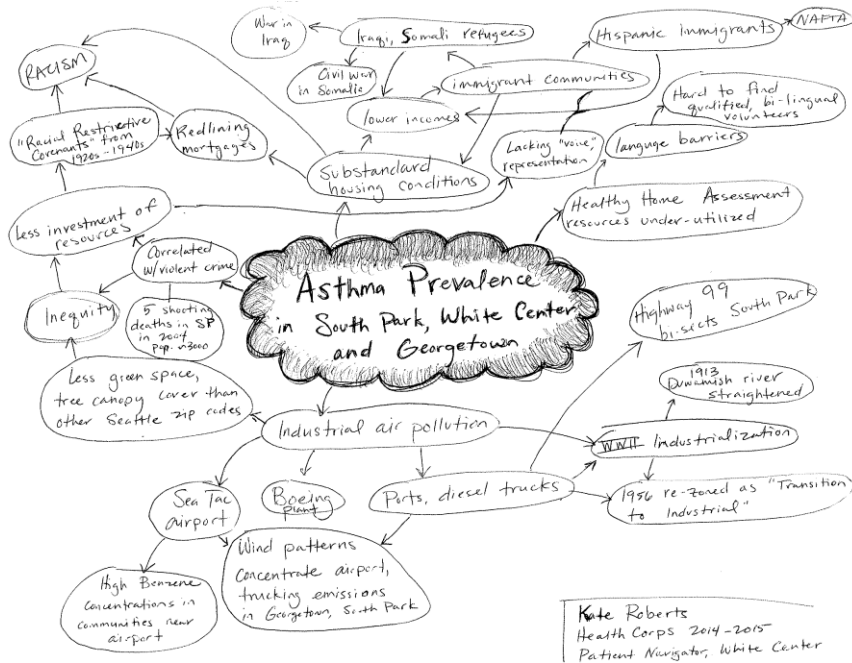
SOLUTIONS



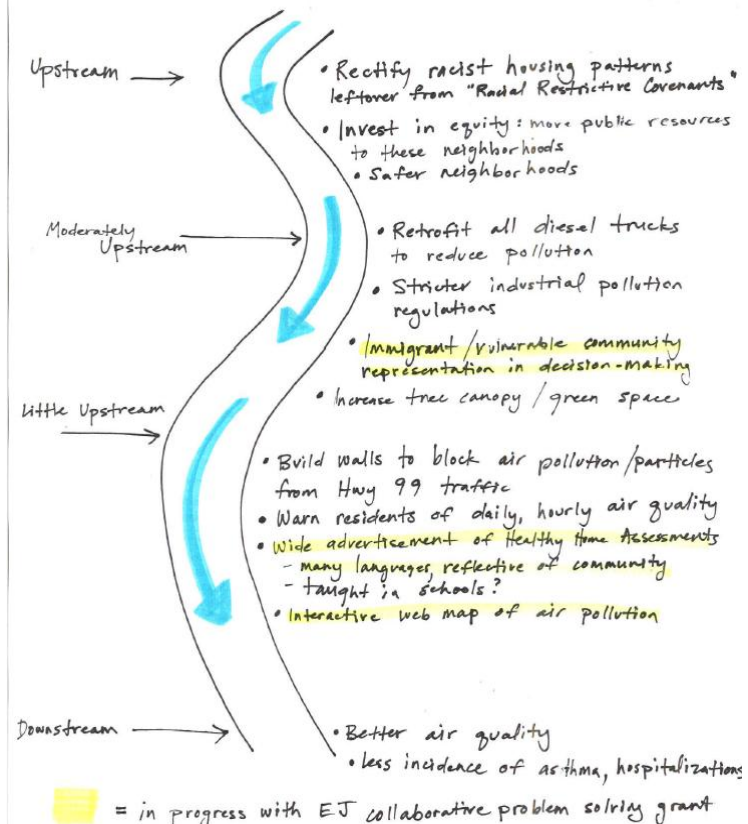
¹ From "Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians" at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants>

Asthma Prevalence in South Park, White Center, and Georgetown, Washington.
 Community Action for Clean Air- EPA Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Grant
 (Kate Roberts, Sea Mar Community Health Centers HealthCorps volunteer, 2014-2015)

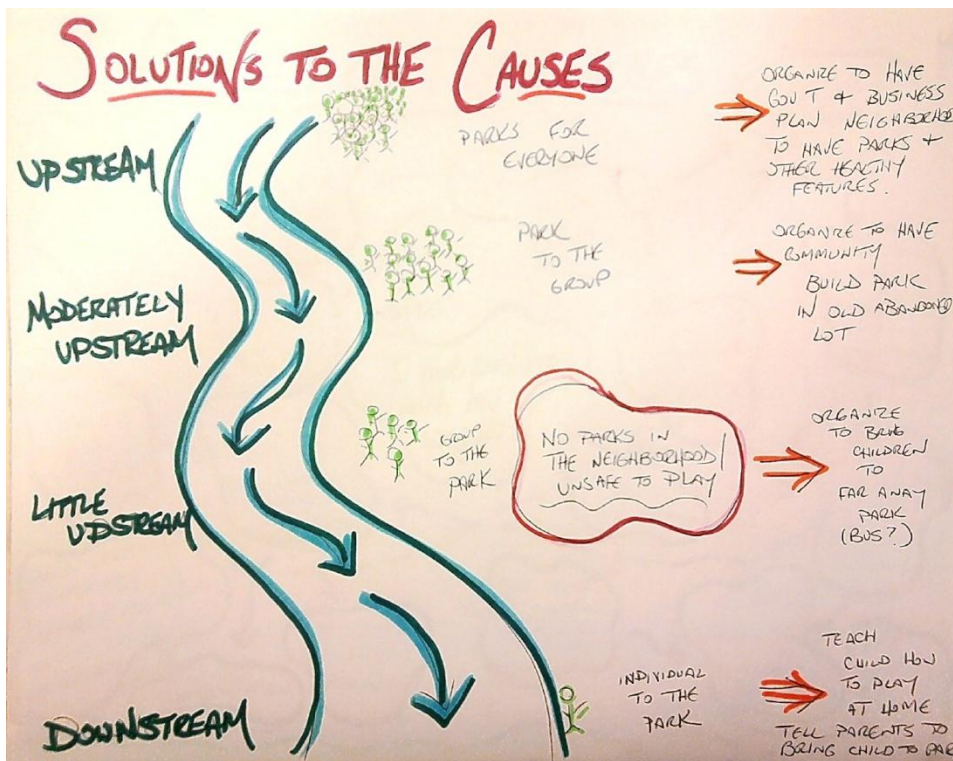
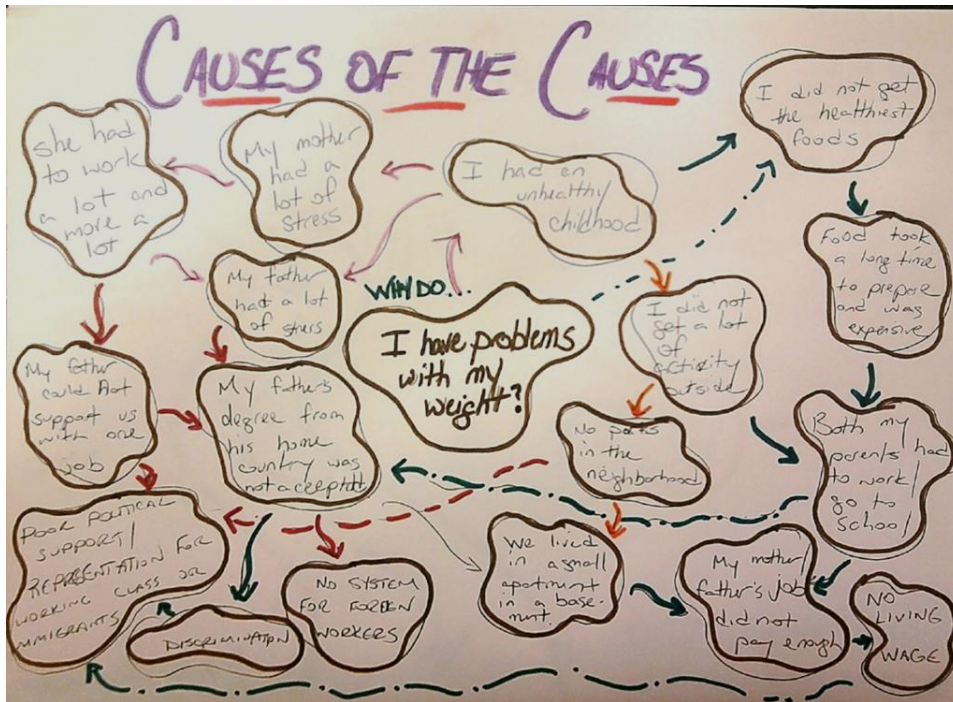
CAUSES OF THE CAUSES



SOLUTIONS TO THE CAUSES



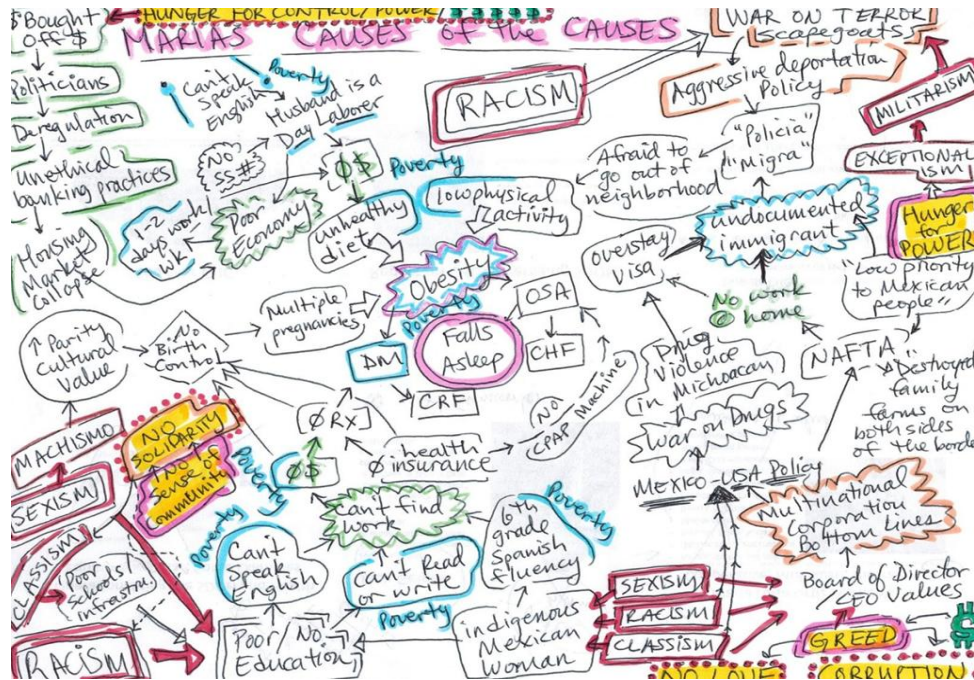
Problems with my weight (Jon Huang, University of WA, MPHc in 2010)



Why is Maria back in urgent care?

(Dr Julian Perez, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, 2014)

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SOLUTIONS TO THE CAUSES

