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- Provides direct services and resources to victims of crime across the country
- Advocates for laws and policies that secure resources, rights, and protections for crime victims
- Delivers training and technical assistance to victim service organizations, counselors, attorneys, criminal justice agencies, and allied professionals serving victims of crime
- Fosters cutting-edge thinking about the impact of crime and the ways each of us can help victims of crime rebuild their lives.

The **Youth Initiative** of the National Center for Victims of Crime leads a national strategy to identify and fill the gaps in interventions to support young victims of crime. Although children and teens are victimized at a higher rate than any other age group in the United States, they have the fewest rights, protections, and services. The Youth Initiative works with youth and local, state, and national partners, as well as federal agencies, to increase young victims' access to critical services. The Initiative's National Youth Advisory Council and youth-led community change projects work to ensure that young people have a voice on these issues.



A Review of Minneapolis's Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

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About This Report

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice invited the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) to create this *Innovations* publication describing an initiative by the city of Minneapolis to prevent and reduce violence by and against youth. The Minneapolis initiative began in 2006 and is ongoing. To document the initiative and highlight its law enforcement innovations, NCVC staff visited Minneapolis in October 2008 and conducted a series of interviews with Minneapolis and Hennepin County officials, community leaders, and law enforcement officers. Most interviews took place during the site visit and some were conducted afterward by phone; all interviews occurred in October and November 2008. Quotations provided in this report are from notes or transcripts of those interviews.

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Introduction

And so for a couple of hours, I watched these kids walk by the casket of their dead friend. And I just kept seeing these faces, and I just kept internalizing all this grief, and not honestly knowing at that moment what to do. The difference between then and now is we know what to do. And that's an incredibly powerful feeling for this community.

~Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak¹

The funeral described above followed the June 17, 2006 shooting of Brian Cole, a popular high school basketball player from North Minneapolis who was killed while standing with friends on a street corner near his home early in the evening. He was not the shooter's intended target, but that didn't make him any less dead.

In 2005 and 2006, the city of Minneapolis had a surge in violent youth-involved crime, including homicide, armed robbery, and aggravated assaults. In a 2008 interview, Mayor Rybak reported meeting with mayors from around the country who were all grappling with rising youth violence, and none of them seemed to know what to do. After attending too many funerals for teenagers, the mayor—a father of two teens himself—found the violence taking a personal toll. “I had been out to so many funerals and shootings and been with lots of people whose kids had died... As somebody raising teenagers, the only way I can relate to a parent whose kid has died is to think about, ‘how would I feel?’ And after about three funerals in a month, I turned to a friend of mine . . . and said, ‘...I’ve basically killed (my kids) in my mind three times this month.’”

After deciding he'd had enough of funerals for teenagers, the mayor directed his staff to look for answers: What did the research say? Which model programs were working to prevent youth violence? After some searching, the mayor's small task force on youth violence prevention found perhaps the most famous and successful youth

¹This quotation comes from a personal interview with the mayor on October 29, 2008. All quotations throughout the document result from in-person or telephone interviews conducted in October and November 2008.

violence prevention program: the “Boston Miracle.” When violence in that city hit its peak in the early 1990s, much of it fueled by the crack cocaine market, Boston responded with a multifaceted, collaborative community effort. It involved the mayor’s office and the city council, the police department, the health department, the faith community, youth and social services, and dozens of outreach workers who took to the streets and offered at-risk youth a way out of the “thug life.”

One of the Boston program’s most innovative aspects was its use of a public health model to combat the problem. The city approached youth violence in the same way public health officials approach a disease epidemic—with several layers of prevention and intervention, usually labeled *primary prevention*, *secondary prevention*, and *tertiary prevention* (or *intervention*). If the problem were the flu, for example, primary prevention (aimed at the general public) would involve vaccinating as many people as possible, while secondary prevention would include special efforts to protect the most vulnerable, such as young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems. Tertiary prevention or intervention would entail using the best available medicines to treat those already affected.

Primary prevention involves education, outreach, and support for all children and teens. Secondary prevention entails heightened attention to those most at risk, such as youth living in high-crime neighborhoods or having other risk factors such as low attachment to school and little family support. Finally, tertiary prevention or intervention includes several steps. Youth who have already committed violence are triaged and directed into the most appropriate response: counseling, probation, or either a juvenile diversion program for low-level first-time offenders or detention for more serious or chronic offenders. Both groups are subject to long-term rehabilitation, where possible (to prevent recurrence of the violence and keep it from spreading to others). Intervention also includes assistance and support for youth victims of violence.²

²See the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center’s “Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Fact Sheet” at www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/intervention.asp for more information on the public health model of youth violence prevention.

A Public Health Approach

	Flu	Youth Violence
Primary Prevention	Vaccines for all	Education and support for all
Secondary Prevention	Targeted efforts to vaccinate babies, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems	Targeted efforts to reach youth living in high-crime neighborhoods and those with low school attachment and little family support
Tertiary Prevention or Intervention	Treat patients who have the flu	Rehabilitate youthful offenders and provide services for youth victims

Taking Action

In November 2006, Mayor Rybak proposed and the Minneapolis City Council adopted a resolution endorsing a public health approach to preventing youth violence in conjunction with a sound law enforcement strategy. The resolution established a youth violence prevention steering committee whose mission was to develop a comprehensive multiyear plan to reduce youth violence in Minneapolis and prevent future violence.

The steering committee included professionals from law enforcement, juvenile detention, public health, youth programs, education, social services, and city and county government. One of the committee’s first actions was to have Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, one of the architects of the “Boston Miracle,” come and share lessons from Boston with stakeholders in Minneapolis.³

³Dr. Prothrow-Stith, the former Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health and a professor at the Harvard University School of Public Health, was one of the first public health professionals to advocate for treating violence as a public health problem and to convey that viewpoint to a mass audience through various publications and speaking engagements. For a full biography, see www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography_257.html.

After Dr. Prothrow-Stith's presentation, several subsequent meetings, and work in subcommittees, the steering committee produced a comprehensive document called *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis*. True to the public health model, the Blueprint lays out primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention goals:

1. Ensure that every young person in Minneapolis receives support from at least one trusted adult in his or her family or community. (*primary prevention*)
2. Intervene at the first sign that youth and families are at risk for or involved in violence. (*secondary prevention*)
3. Do not give up on our kids; work to restore and get them back on track. (*tertiary prevention or intervention*)
4. Recognize that violence is learned and can be unlearned by reducing the impact of violent messages in our media, culture, and entertainment. (*primary prevention on a broader scale*)

Using these four ambitious goals as a framework, the steering committee crafted 34 specific recommended action steps to permanently reduce and prevent youth violence in the city.⁴

In January 2008, the city formally launched the Blueprint and hired a youth violence prevention coordinator who reports to both the city's health commissioner and the mayor. The mayor's policy aides also work on the project, which involves coordinating existing programs under the framework and finding resources to support new or expanded efforts by both community-based and governmental agencies to carry out the Blueprint's recommendations. Prevention coordinator Bass Zanjani describes the Blueprint as "an initial framework to begin the discussion on homicide and violence reduction... It is an organic document (that) needs to keep developing and evolving."

⁴The full document, *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis*, is available at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/yvpreport.asp.

A Dual Approach: Criminal Justice and Public Health

Minneapolis officials believe that law enforcement and violence prevention are both essential components of creating a safer community. In addition to launching the city's violence prevention initiative, Mayor Rybak has invested heavily in the police department and its efforts to curb youth crime. Lt. Bryan Schafer, head of Juvenile Investigations at the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD), participates in Blueprint meetings and strongly believes in the power of prevention. "There are kids (who) are going to have to go to jail—that's what the system was built for," he allows. "But that's a small percentage. Investing in prevention up front, we can have a huge impact," which should be clear in 3 to 5 years, he believes, when teens now being reached by quality prevention programs are in their early 20s and are *not* committing crimes.

Strengthening Law Enforcement

As the city was developing the Blueprint, surges in juvenile-related crime prompted the MPD to re-create its juvenile unit, which had been disbanded in 2003. The spike in youth crime, combined with the mayor's aggressive focus on preventing youth violence, led to an "alignment of the stars," in the words of Lt. Schafer. Because of the urgent crime situation and the political backing of the mayor and city council, Lt. Schafer's unit received the resources and latitude to create the necessary programs to bring juvenile crime in Minneapolis under control.

The juvenile unit currently has five major initiatives: (1) aggressive investigation of every violent offense committed by a juvenile; (2) the Juvenile Criminal Apprehension Team (JCAT), a multijurisdictional group of law enforcement officers who search out and arrest juveniles with outstanding warrants; (3) a new juvenile diversion program where youth with low-level violent offenses are supervised and connected to community resources; (4) a Juvenile Supervision Center where MPD officers connect youth who are truant or out after curfew to case management, counseling, and other services; and (5) a School Resource Officer (SRO) program, which places MPD officers in public schools to strengthen police and community ties. (Previously, the Minneapolis Park Police manned the schools.)

Blueprint Goals and Action Steps

The *Blueprint for Preventing Youth Violence* contains four broad goals and 34 action steps. This section highlights some of the accomplishments of the city of Minneapolis, Hennepin County (which includes Minneapolis and the surrounding area), and various community-based programs. The information is not exhaustive; many other efforts are underway, and new programs are constantly being brought under the Blueprint umbrella as citywide coordination increases and awareness grows about the many existing programs whose work fits within the Blueprint framework.

Goal 1: Ensure that every young person in Minneapolis is supported by at least one trusted adult in their family or their community.

The first goal is the broadest and in many ways the most ambitious. What would it take for a city to ensure that all young people have at least one trusted adult to talk to, either within their family or in the community? The youth violence prevention coordinator's first task was to find out where those connections already existed and how to increase them.

Perhaps the most promising—if also the most difficult—way to forge connections between youth and trusted adults is to support and strengthen teens' relationships with their parents. To this end, several parent support programs receive additional aid through specialized grant funds and inclusion in the Blueprint initiative. One program—the Minnesota Visiting Nurses Association (MVNA) home visiting program—intervenes in children's lives at the earliest stages by supporting pregnant and parenting teens with visits from public health nurses. Other programs offer specialized education and support to the parents of adolescents to help them keep their older children away from violence and on a path toward success in school and in life.

Teen Mothers

Through the MVNA program, public health nurses make monthly house calls to pregnant and parenting teens, offering education and information on pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care. During the program (available until children are 2 years old), the nurses often become trusted friends and mentors to the young mothers. The program aims to ensure that the young mothers have healthy birth outcomes, stay in school and graduate from high school, and avoid subsequent pregnancy while in the program. The program also promotes bonding and maternal attachment to the baby and fosters the child's growth and development. The program thus provides a trusted adult mentor for teen girls in stressful circumstances and also plants the seeds for a strong relationship between those girls and their own children. Research has documented many positive outcomes of this model, including a significant reduction in juvenile delinquency by the children of program participants.⁵

Parents of Teens

Parents of teens seeking community support have far fewer options than the MVNA teen mothers, yet these parents are fighting a battle to save their children from the violence of the streets. The need to support parents of older children led two local organizations to launch independent but strikingly similar culturally rooted programs: Project Murua, an Urban League of Minneapolis program for parents of African-American children ages 8 to 18, and Padres, a program of La Oportunidad, for Latino parents of teens. Both programs use a cultural framework that draws on parents' core beliefs and strengths to help them understand and appreciate the stages of adolescent development and what teens need from their parents. Participants from both groups say the programs help them learn to listen and relate better to their children. In fact, parents report that they yell less, talk more, and have a closer connection with their teenage children than they had before participating in the program. Whether such programs reduce youth involvement in violence is an open question, as the programs and the city are still evaluating the

⁵David Olds et al., "Long-term Effects of Nurse Home Visitation on Children's Criminal and Antisocial Behavior," *JAMA* 280 (1998): 1238–44.

programs' impact. But these programs are undoubtedly meeting the Blueprint's first goal of connecting youth to a trusted adult, the adults with the greatest potential impact on their lives—their parents.

Mentors

For some youth, particularly in the most crime-prone neighborhoods, family relationships may be dysfunctional. Even healthy family relationships may not be enough to buffer against the violence that surrounds these teenagers. Mentoring programs give youth opportunities to connect with compassionate adults outside their families who can provide guidance and act as role models. Such programs, however, often desperately need more adult volunteers to serve as mentors and more funding to support their infrastructure. At the end of 2008, despite the Blueprint initiative's spotlight on mentoring, a Native American-preference public housing development in Minneapolis was forced to shut down its mentoring program for lack of funds. The city's youth violence prevention coordinator and the mayor's office are working to locate outside funds to increase mentoring opportunities in Minneapolis, and they have also encouraged all city employees to consider volunteering as mentors through the local Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

The city's STEP-UP jobs program also connects youth with adult role models, as well as providing them with much-needed income and job skills. Jobs for youth are especially critical in the summer months, when youth are not in school: as one young STEP-UP intern in City Hall told his supervisor, keeping his commitment to his job may have prevented him from getting into trouble with his friends. This real-world work experience also helps the youth to envision a future with more possibilities than what they may see in their own families and neighborhoods.

The Minneapolis Police Department's School Resource Officer (SRO) program is yet another way of connecting youth to a trusted adult, with additional benefits. Youth can learn to see police and other authority figures not as the enemy but as people who are concerned about them and can offer help. Returning the SRO program to the MPD (from the park police) has already paid dividends. For example,

one officer responding to a domestic violence call was greeted at the door by a student from the school where the officer was the SRO. Knowing the officer and trusting him, the boy opened the door and welcomed him into the home.

Goal 2: Intervene at the first sign that youth and families are at risk for or involved in violence.

“Secondary prevention,” in public health terms, means targeting prevention efforts at people who are known to be at risk. Under the Minneapolis Blueprint, law enforcement is focusing new attention on youth whose acting out might once have merited little response. Formerly, youth who got into minor trouble were often ignored until they did something “really bad,” according to some law enforcement officials interviewed for this report. Youth accused of minor offenses were never arrested, and those caught being truant or breaking curfew were processed through the old curfew and truancy center and released—with many repeatedly cycling through.

Intervention with Truants and Curfew Breakers

As part of the Blueprint initiative and in conjunction with the MPD's newly reconstituted juvenile unit, a Juvenile Supervision Center (JSC) was opened under a joint powers agreement among the city of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and the Minneapolis Public Schools. The JSC is operated by a social service agency called The Link, whose staff not only “processes” youth who are truant or out after curfew but also assesses the youth for service needs and connects them with case management, counseling, and other services to address the root cause of their truancy or lack of late night supervision. This approach has achieved remarkable success. In 2008, more than 2,800 youth were brought to the center, and 79 percent did not return.⁶

Another innovative partnership between the schools and the police is a program called “Knock and Talk.” Under the program, which is managed by the school system's attendance office, a student's fifth

⁶ City of Minneapolis, *Results Minneapolis: Youth Violence*, www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/results-oriented-minneapolis/docs/youth-results.pdf (accessed July 9, 2009), page 16.

unexcused absence triggers a visit to the family from a police officer and a social worker. This two-person team sends the family a strong message in person, and in the case of immigrant families, in their own language: school attendance is mandatory, and if there are problems that are preventing the youth from attending school, the community stands ready to provide help and resources for overcoming those problems.

Arresting Those Who Need to Be Arrested

Because successful intervention requires effective law enforcement, Minneapolis has mapped out a clear strategy for the small minority of serious and chronic youthful offenders who are responsible for a large portion of youth violence.⁷ In 2006, one of the first actions of the MPD's newly reconstituted juvenile unit was to establish the Juvenile Criminal Apprehension Team (JCAT), a concept arising from a meeting that unit commander Lt. Schafer held with a precinct commander, the executive director of a national police research organization, and a U.S. Marshal. The group discussed the fact that no one was pursuing the warrants being issued for violent juveniles because of jurisdictional ambiguities between the sheriff's office and the local police departments. One participant suggested creating a multijurisdictional team of officers to locate and arrest juveniles with outstanding warrants, and the JCAT was born.

The MPD juvenile unit sergeant who leads the JCAT works with U.S. Marshals, probation officers, sheriffs' deputies, and local police officers from various towns. These officers voluntarily collaborate twice a week to locate and arrest juveniles with warrants. The cross-jurisdictional team has authority to apprehend these juvenile offenders anywhere in the Minneapolis metro area, says Lt. Schafer. When the JCAT enters a home to search for a juvenile with an outstanding arrest warrant, the team leader approaches the parents with goodwill and empathy, validating their frustration with their child and explaining that JCAT is there to help. Lt. Schafer describes

⁷For details on the proportion of offenses committed by chronic youth offenders, see Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2006, 84.

the JCAT as a “prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategy all wrapped into one.” As of October 2009, the team had searched more than 3,600 homes and made more than 1,200 arrests.⁸

Appropriate Sanctions for Gun Offenses

One successful response to both high-level and low-level youthful offenders is the new Juvenile Gun Offender Initiative, a joint effort of the city and Hennepin County's Juvenile Corrections Department. When youth are arrested with a gun of any kind (including replicas and BB guns), authorities carefully gear penalties to the nature of the offense and the youth's criminal history. Repeat offenders or youth who have actually used the gun are immediately placed outside their homes, either in the juvenile detention center or the county home school. First-time offenders who have not used the gun are enrolled in an education and work program that impresses upon them the consequences of gun violence. The youth are required to visit the city morgue and the emergency room, and hear presentations from victims of gun crimes. They must also complete a certain number of hours of community service.

After a press conference announcing the new sanctions in summer 2008, the police made several sweeps of high-crime neighborhoods to ferret out illegal guns. The program is working, says D. Christine Owens, former area director of Juvenile Services in Hennepin County's Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation, because it differentiates repeat offenders from first-time offenders who have a greater chance of changing course. For the early offenders, the program focuses on high-impact education about the consequences of gun violence, which is more likely than a classroom program to affect youths' future decisions about gun possession. Through the media attention and the sweeps, the violent and repeat offenders have received the message that they will be caught and sent away.

⁸Interview with Lt. Bryan Schafer, November 25, 2008.

School Resource Officers

The return of MPD officers to the SRO role brings another layer of police investment in tracking youth at risk. Officers not only interact with all students in their assigned schools but also pay special attention to youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system or are at risk of going down that path. And in a newly adopted policy, during school vacations, including summer break, rather than being assigned to precincts for patrol duty as was done in the past, the SROs will remain together as part of the juvenile unit and will conduct home visits to the most at-risk students from their assigned schools. This effort will signal to the youth that they have not been forgotten while school is out and that someone in the community still cares about them and is watching to be sure they keep out of trouble.

Goal 3: Do not give up on our kids; work to restore and get them back on track.

“It’s important that you deal with the kids that need to be dealt with, who are out there perpetrating crimes on the community,” said Chris Owens, Hennepin County’s former director of juvenile corrections. Yet, “there’s a huge group of kids out there who need something different, not criminal justice.” Authorities strive to hold young offenders responsible for their actions, rehabilitate those in the correctional system, and prevent first-time and low-level offenders from entering the juvenile justice system in the first place.

Restorative Justice Programs

To help put young offenders back on track, the city endorses restorative justice programs, which often provide an alternative to incarceration for juvenile offenders while holding them accountable in ways that incarceration alone usually does not. In general, restorative justice means that offenders take responsibility for their actions and make amends directly to victims when possible and also to the community. One such program in Minneapolis is the Midtown Community Restorative Justice program, which receives referrals from the MPD’s juvenile diversion program (described below) as well as other court-based programs. To be eligible to participate (as an alternative to detention, for example), juvenile offenders must admit and accept responsibility for their offense. The program coordinator then sets up conferences with the offender, the offender’s family or

other support people, direct victims who are willing to participate, and peers or other community members who can either stand in for the direct victim or talk about the harm to the community caused by the offender's actions.

During the initial conference, the group discusses the offense and decides an appropriate course of action for the offender. Such a course of action generally includes some type of amends to the victim (such as a letter of apology or payment to replace stolen or damaged property), service to the community, and a productive activity that provides a positive direction for the youthful offender (such as joining a sports program or a career shadowing for a day). When all participants have agreed on a course of action, the offender, his or her family member or support person, and someone representing the peer group sign a contract. The program then holds two more conferences, at 3-month intervals, to follow up on the offender's completion of the required actions.

In seeking to promote rehabilitation, the city can have only limited impact on juvenile offender programs run by Hennepin County, as the funding and control reside with the county rather than the city. For that reason, Minneapolis focuses on building infrastructure and establishing restorative justice programs in communities to which juvenile offenders are returning from detention. Of particular concern are the Somali and Hmong communities, which have large numbers of recent immigrants and also high levels of violence. These newer communities, unlike the more established Latino and African-American communities, have not yet developed strong community-based organizations to support youth and families. City Hall is working to secure funding for such efforts.

Diversion Programs

In addition to revamping their approaches to serious juvenile offenders, the city and the county sought a better strategy for the large number of youth who were committing low-level violence but probably could be better rehabilitated outside the correctional system. Previously, some of these youth might have been adjudicated and others ignored. But through the public health lens created by the

Blueprint initiative, police and corrections personnel began to see this group as at-risk youth who needed appropriately tailored prevention and intervention programs.

One tool to support this effort is the MPD's juvenile diversion program, reestablished in 2008 (after a 10-year lapse) to help reduce the number of cases that flooded the juvenile courts after the MPD began investigating all juvenile cases that carry a penalty and the JCAT began rounding up offenders with outstanding warrants. The program presents an alternative to court involvement for juveniles charged with low-level violent offenses (generally for the first time), who are seen as rehabilitatable.

In this program, the diversion coordinator meets with eligible youth and their parents, who sign a contract to participate, and connects the youth with community programming that includes accountability measures such as community service or restorative justice, as well as after-school activities that match the youth's interests. The program seeks to hold youth accountable while offering them a chance to explore their interests and make positive choices about how to spend their time and energy. As the program has been in operation less than a year as of this writing, there are not yet statistics on the recidivism of youth participants.

While past diversion efforts often focused on youth charged with shoplifting and other property offenses, the current program instead targets youth charged with low-level violent offenses such as assault, domestic assault, disorderly conduct, or threats. This change is in accord with the Blueprint's effort to prevent violent crime and rehabilitate youth who perpetrate violence.

The MDP also enlists the help of private diversion programs, such as the YWCA's innovative Girls Resolution and Prevention (RAP) program. The MPD's juvenile diversion program or the courts refer young female offenders to the Girls RAP program. In recognition of girls' strong need for social connectedness, the offenders can invite other nonoffending friends to participate in the program with them. Under the 10-week Girls RAP curriculum, the girls sit in a circle with a trained facilitator and discuss subjects such as anger management,

conflict resolution, personal power, responsibility, and leadership. After the girls complete the program, counselors call them monthly for a year to follow up and then check recidivism rates at the end of the year. Since the program's creation in 1997, an average of 77 percent of program participants do not reoffend within 1 year of completing the program.⁹ After they graduate, the girls can also take advantage of the program's leadership opportunities by applying for a 40-hour paid internship or becoming a junior counselor.

Goal 4: Recognize that violence is learned and can be unlearned by reducing the impact of violent messages in our media, culture, and entertainment.

The Blueprint initiative assumes that children are not born violent—that violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned through strong, positive messages that counteract the many violent ones youth receive every day through their music, television, movies, video games, and other media. The committee enlisted the Minneapolis Foundation to lead a campaign, now in its infancy, to stop the promotion of violence as a problem-solving tool and make violence prevention everyone's responsibility.¹⁰ The Foundation plans to create a youth-led public education campaign with credible antiviolence messages delivered by young people and the cultural messengers they respect.

Mayor Rybak, too, is doing his part to help young people “unlearn” the culture of violence. His annual addresses to ninth graders at all Minneapolis public high schools stress that young people, “our most valuable generation” because they speak many languages and move easily between cultures, must also do their part to make the community safer. The money youth spend on “weed” for their parties, the mayor points out, pays for the bullets that end up in their friends' heads. As an alternative to violence, he urges young people to build their futures by continuing their education and taking advantage of the internships, jobs, college information and scholarships, and other opportunities the city offers.

⁹Interview with Erica Sallender, Girls RAP Program Manager, October 28, 2008.

¹⁰Youth violence is one of five community issues addressed by the Minneapolis Foundation through grants and projects in which the Foundation serves as a convener and fosters community collaboration. For more information, see www.minneapolisfoundation.org.

Citywide Coordination

Because the Blueprint has ambitious goals and involves so many government and nonprofit agencies, coordination is crucial for the initiative's success. After the Blueprint document was complete, the original steering committee revised the project structure to include more individuals and groups who sought a role in implementing and overseeing the effort. The structure now includes an executive committee (made up of 21 representatives of government and nonprofits, as well as one youth member) and smaller work groups of professionals organized by interest area, such as family support or juvenile justice. These work groups meet monthly to develop and revise benchmarks for their topic area objectives. Because work group members are generally professionals in the particular interest area of their work group, they help directly implement the group's decisions in the field. The work groups make quarterly progress reports to the executive committee, which oversees the entire initiative.

The youth violence prevention coordinator, a city employee who reports directly to both the health commissioner and the mayor, manages the executive committee and project work group structure. He spends a large part of each day meeting with citywide stakeholders to review the Blueprint's goals and objectives and determine the stakeholders' roles in furthering them. One of the mayor's policy aides also serves as a direct liaison between the mayor's office and Blueprint stakeholders across the city.

Youth Involvement

From the beginning of the Blueprint planning process, Minneapolis saw the importance of involving youth—particularly from the neighborhoods with the worst crime problems—in finding solutions to youth-related crime. The city involved the Minneapolis Youth Congress (MYC), a council of youth representatives from every ward of the city who meet regularly to tackle challenges affecting their lives, such as health problems, unemployment, lack of transportation, and violence. The youth brainstorm solutions they would like to see and then meet with policymakers and professionals in these areas to advance their agenda.

After the steering committee completed the first Blueprint draft, the mayor met with the MYC to seek their feedback. The youth raised important questions and made many constructive suggestions that were later incorporated into the Blueprint. For example, one exchange about guns in schools and youths' fears about reporting them led the city to recommend a confidential youth tip line as a Blueprint action step. The committee held a subsequent meeting to let the youth know which of their ideas had been included in the Blueprint, which had not, and the reasons for the committee's decisions. One youth continues to serve as a steering committee member, with a role in shaping how the Blueprint implementation unfolds. The MYC continues to facilitate youth input on a wide range of local policy issues.

Measuring Success and Sustaining the Effort

How measurably effective and sustainable is the Blueprint project? “It’s nice to talk at a meeting, but is it going to be backed up by action?” said an MPD civilian employee who is pleased but only cautiously optimistic about the effort so far. Professionals who have worked with urban youth for years have seen programs, initiatives, and calls for change come and go. Can the structure built by the mayor and the Minneapolis Health Department permanently change how families and communities support youth and hold them accountable? And if so, can these changes lead to real reductions in the amount of violence by and against youth?

Outcomes

As of this writing, the Blueprint, launched in January 2008, has operated for a little more than a year. With such a large and multifaceted effort, defining and measuring the results and distinguishing the changes caused by the initiative from those that might have happened without the initiative are daunting tasks. Nonetheless, the early numbers, if not definitive, are promising.

Minneapolis’s crime statistics show evidence of progress. Juvenile-related violent crime citywide declined 29 percent from 2007 to 2008, and 37 percent from 2006 to 2008. Four of the five targeted, high-violence Minneapolis neighborhoods identified in the *Blueprint for Action* reported even more significant drops. Violent crime in the Folwell, McKinley, Hawthorne, and Jordan neighborhoods declined 39 percent from 2007 to 2008 and 43 percent from 2006 to 2008.¹¹ The percentage of Minneapolis crime committed by juveniles decreased from 42 percent to 25 percent, and the average population in youth detention for the county has decreased from 100 to 58 in that same period.¹²

¹¹E-mail from Claudia Fuentes, Policy Aide to the Mayor, January 20, 2009.

¹²Interview with Lt. Bryan Schafer, Minneapolis Police Department, November 25, 2008.

Beyond these numbers, it appears that the process of creating and implementing the Blueprint has produced its own benefits for those working to prevent violence and develop healthy youth throughout the city. Virtually everyone interviewed for this report praised the coordination among agencies, jurisdictions, and disciplines that has resulted from the Blueprint initiative. The city and the county are talking more and sharing resources instead of competing for the same dollars. Staff members of community-based organizations have new knowledge of what other organizations are doing and how they might coordinate their efforts. Community groups feel part of a broader discussion and that the decision-makers are interested in what they have to say. Parents and community members have been empowered to act against the violence that affects their children. The city is helping to build the capacity of its diverse ethnic enclaves to prevent youth violence and reintegrate their youth into the community after they leave the juvenile justice system. Although economic conditions limit the prospects for new funding for programs, the Blueprint seems to have tangibly increased collaboration across the board.

Sustainability

Producing results is one challenge; sustaining them is another. Given the mayor's central role in developing and promoting the Blueprint initiative, it seems wise to question whether Minneapolis can continue the Blueprint initiative after the mayor leaves office. More than a dozen professionals interviewed for this report believe the initiative is sustainable. Despite the importance of the mayor's support to the initiative, the youth violence coordinator noted the mayor has less power than the city council under Minneapolis's city government structure. Because the city council has fully endorsed the Blueprint initiative and appropriated funds for the coordinator position, which falls under the health department and not the mayor's office, the initiative structure would remain intact even without Mayor Rybak.

The initiative also has strong buy-in from community groups throughout the city. The large number of partners who have been invited to the table and taken a role—including ethnic and faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, and traditional youth-serving organizations such as the YWCA and Big Brothers Big Sisters—creates a broad base of support for using the public health model to coordinate youth violence prevention efforts.

Replicating the Blueprint in Other Cities

Minneapolis city officials hope not only to sustain the youth violence prevention effort but to bring the model to other cities and towns across the country with help from the state and federal government. Because of the crime reduction achieved in the Blueprint's first year, even in the midst of an economic downturn, officials have concluded that the Blueprint's public health model and associated law enforcement innovations offer answers for the problem of youth violence.

The mayor's and health department's staffs have developed a legislative agenda to encourage the state of Minnesota to fund local communities' mentoring programs and other important Blueprint plan components. The legislative agenda also urges support for common-sense gun laws to reduce the number of illegal guns available to potentially violent youth. Minneapolis officials have advocated for Minnesota to adopt a resolution declaring youth violence to be a public health problem that warrants a public health approach to prevention. The bill, "Youth Violence as a Public Health Issue," passed, and the governor signed it on May 21, 2009.

At the national level, Mayor Rybak has met with the President and various Cabinet members and agency heads to encourage the type of collaboration among federal agencies that the Blueprint fostered at the local level. Health, juvenile justice, law enforcement, and education agencies all play a role, at both the local and federal levels, in the prevention of youth violence.

Conclusion

Minneapolis's public health approach to youth violence identifies problems, uses data, creates partnerships, and engages in practical problem solving to create a safer community. The city's *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis* attacks the root causes of violence while holding juvenile perpetrators accountable for their actions and offering rehabilitation where appropriate. In the process, the initiative has woven a citywide fabric of partnerships that other jurisdictions can replicate. Community members and professionals from juvenile justice, law enforcement, community programs, and public health—no longer feeling isolated—have a renewed sense of purpose as part of a larger effort, moving in the same direction toward the same goal. Crime statistics are showing preliminary positive effects. A young but promising initiative, the Minneapolis Blueprint offers grounds for further research and potential for the quest to end youth violence.

For more information about this report or the National Center for Victims of Crime's Youth Initiative, contact:

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Resources for Further Reading

Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis—official city web site with full document. www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/yv.asp

Influencing Behavior: The Power of Protective Factors in Reducing Youth Violence, Resnick, M.D. and P.M. Rinehart. Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2004.

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center—CDC funded. www.safeyouth.org

National Center for Victims of Crime, Teen Victim Initiative: www.ncvc.org/youth. Resources for youth victims, youth service providers, victim service providers, and concerned adults:

Reaching and Serving Teen Victims guidebook provides insight into the developmental impact of victimization on youth and how to help, 2005.

Teen Action Toolkit: Building a Youth-led Response to Teen Victimization offers practical guidance on how to create outreach projects involving youth, 2007. (This resource is COPS funded.)

Because Things Happen Every Day: Responding to Teenage Victims of Crime award-winning video shows how law enforcement agencies, schools, victim advocates, and youth can all benefit when they work together to confront youth victimization, 2005. (This resource is COPS funded.)

Preventing Violence: A Guide to Implementing the Recommendations of the World Report on Violence and Health, Butchart, A., A. Phinney, P. Check, and A. Villaveces. Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2004.

Relevant COPS POP Guides: *Bullying in Schools, Juvenile Runaways, and Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders*.

Strategies to Prevent Youth Violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 4, 2008. www.cdc.gov

Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General. Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001.



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