CONNECTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Protecting youth from violence is essential to ensure the economic strength of our nation. Leaders in public, private, and non-profit sectors are increasingly recognizing the importance of preventing violence before it ever occurs. This recognition has led to critical investments in community-based and evidence-informed violence prevention strategies that can improve health and expand economic opportunity for communities.

Preventing youth violence makes communities more attractive for investment by businesses and homeowners.

Evidence shows that business viability, property values, and social services are negatively impacted by high rates of violence. Fortunately, violence is preventable. Public health approaches that are proactive, comprehensive, equity-focused, and inclusive can prevent violence before it starts and help bolster economic development. Moreover, the reverse is also true: Strengthening local economies improves the health of communities and helps keep our young people safe.

Preventing youth violence is key to building a strong American workforce.

Involvement in violence can disrupt a young person’s life trajectory in many ways. Being a victim of violence during adolescence has been shown to adversely impact academic performance, educational attainment, labor force participation, and future earning potential. Additionally, the interplay between youth violence and substance abuse can be detrimental to workforce readiness. As the U.S. workforce ages, investments in youth violence prevention are increasingly important. These investments can help ensure that young people have equitable opportunities to participate in the workforce, particularly in areas where social injustice, poverty, and structural racism present significant challenges for communities and youth.

Preventing youth violence enhances comprehensive community and economic development.

Violence is often high in the same places where unemployment is high, commercial corridors are vacant or blighted, and other economic and social challenges exist. Failures to address the root causes of violence – and their connections to the social determinants of health and equity – ultimately undermine efforts to overcome these challenges. Fortunately, violence is preventable, and preventing violence is both socially and economically beneficial for every community.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

Communities across the nation have employed a variety of strategies to create environments of economic opportunity that support youth violence prevention. For instance, the STRYVE (Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere) initiative, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), supported local public health leadership for youth violence prevention. Through STRYVE, local health departments were able to implement a variety of youth violence prevention programs, including Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES!).

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COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NATION HAVE EMPLOYED A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTS OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY THAT SUPPORT YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION. FOR INSTANCE, THE STRYVE (STRIVING TO REDUCE YOUTH VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE) INITIATIVE, FUNDDED BY THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC), SUPPORTED LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERSHIP FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION. THROUGH STRYVE, LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS WERE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT A VARIETY OF YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS, INCLUDING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SOLUTIONS (YES!).

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Efforts that physically alter community environments can have profound positive impacts. For example, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and other similar approaches gather resources for commercial corridor cleaning and marketing. Projects that employ principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) can reclaim blighted and vacant spaces, paving the way for beneficial uses, including business and homeowner investment. When youth are engaged in the planning and implementation of these activities, the positive outcomes for youth and their communities can multiply.

- The Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC) is working with youth and adults to revitalize neighborhoods in three cities – Flint, MI; Youngstown, OH; and Camden, NJ. Results from the study will provide insights into how improvements to social and physical environments can prevent violence and build community resilience.

- Collaborations between neighborhood residents, community organizations, city officials, and police in Philadelphia, PA, Milwaukee, WI, and Providence, RI have reduced instances of violence and crime in these cities, creating environments where young people can work, play, and thrive.

**Integrated Employment & Outreach Strategies**

Initiatives that involve community outreach and connect young people to jobs can positively benefit communities.

- **Three Baltimore communities experienced significant reductions in homicides and non-fatal shootings after implementing the Safe Streets program**, an initiative that connects youth to outreach workers that serve as role models and help to facilitate resolutions to conflicts before they escalate to violence.

- **A study on “One Summer Chicago Plus”** – an employment program designed to reduce violence and prepare youth from underserved communities for the labor market – saw a 43% drop in violent-crime arrests of participants.

**LEARN MORE: REFERENCES & RESOURCES**


