

# PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE PROMOTES EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Youth violence prevention and educational achievement are intricately and directly connected. **When we prevent youth violence, we ensure that generations of young people have an opportunity to achieve academic, professional, and personal success throughout their lives.**

*Preventing youth violence keeps youth in school and increases their likelihood of graduating from high school and college.*

When young people are victims of violence, they are less likely to achieve socioeconomic success in adulthood due to poor school performance.<sup>1</sup> However, when youth attend school regularly and are engaged academically, they are less likely to become involved in violence and more likely to graduate from high school and college.

*Preventing youth violence is essential to building and maintaining a strong American workforce.*

Violence can disrupt a young person's life trajectory in many ways. It can adversely impact their academic performance, educational attainment, labor force participation, and future earning potential.<sup>2</sup> The negative impacts of violence are exacerbated in circumstances of extreme poverty.<sup>3</sup> **When youth are protected from violence and live in economically secure households, they have a greater chance of becoming successful, well-educated adults that are productive members of the American workforce.**

*Preventing youth violence is possible and achievable.*

Violence is not an inevitable consequence of life. All violence is preventable. By implementing comprehensive public health strategies at individual, family, community, and societal levels, we can prevent young people from becoming victims of violence and help them reach their full educational and professional potential.

## SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

**By utilizing public health approaches that are proactive, evidence-informed, and comprehensive, federal, state, and local agencies have successfully prevented violence among youth, while also enhancing their opportunities for educational growth and achievement.** For instance, the U.S. Department of Education's "Project Prevent" grants have helped local educational agencies prevent violence by offering students mental health services, conflict resolution programs, and social and emotional supports.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> Through STRYVE, local health departments implemented Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) – one of several strategies that have been proven to prevent youth

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### Perspectives from Youth



"I had two older brothers who ran the streets when they were young, and my mom didn't want me to be like them. I was involved in the YES! program. We blocked off the streets in one of our neighborhoods called Madison Park Village. We had food, games, and music for the neighborhood to come out and enjoy because usually that neighborhood has drug dealers and all types of drugs in it. What we did was just to help bring the neighborhood back up on its feet in a positive way. I'm going to be attending Bunker Hill Community College and I'm going to be majoring in computer science."

**Neal Stanley**  
Boston, MA



"The reason why I decided to be involved with STRYVE was because the program helped us get involved in creating something that will help us prevent youth violence, not just for our community, but for the

whole Multnomah County. I also want to be a part of a change because as I work to become a school resource police officer, I feel that I would have to be a part of the change when it comes to youth violence."

**David Maza,**  
Portland, OR



"The YES! program was introduced to me during the summer of 2013. I was 17 years old going to my senior year in high school. I have been able to really see what best fits the needs of the youth in the community. Some of

my friends, they took wrong turns. I like to show them that, you could work but your school will take you further because truly and really, your education is the one thing that nobody can take away from you."

**Robert Yanez**  
Houston, TX



violence in communities throughout the nation.

### Becoming a Man – Sports Edition

For many youth, impulsive behaviors, a lack of self-control, and poor conflict resolution skills can lead to violent altercations. Becoming a Man – Sports Edition (BAM-Sports) is a cognitive behavioral therapy program that combines positive behavioral lessons, group counseling, and mentoring with a series of non-traditional after-school sports programs.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Through the BAM-Sports program, youth learn how to positively express their anger, resolve conflicts peacefully, and take responsibility for their behavior.

**Youth who participated in BAM-Sports showed a 44% decrease in violent crime arrests and exhibited improved school performance and engagement, as measured by days present in school, grade-point averages, and school persistence.<sup>6</sup>**

### Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!)

Empowered youth have the critical awareness and motivation necessary to positively impact their own lives, as well as their families, social groups, organizations, and communities. The YES! program empowers youth to engage in their communities, modify social and physical environments that can contribute to youth violence, and create positive community change. Through the YES! program, middle and high school students conceive, plan, and carry out community improvement projects in their neighborhoods. Projects include cleaning public spaces, creating murals, planting community gardens, and building playgrounds.<sup>9,10</sup> **Students that participated in YES! have been less likely to become victims of a crime in their neighborhoods and have exhibited increased academic effort and responsible decision-making.<sup>11</sup>**

### Safe Passage & Safe Routes to School Programs

For youth living in gang “hot spots,” simply walking to and from school can be dangerous. Students that walk to school in these areas may frequently cross gang territories and face

intimidation, robbery, assault, and gang recruitment. Fear of these dangers can result in youth missing classes, dropping out of school, and avoiding public spaces.<sup>12</sup> However, through “Safe Passage” and “Safe Routes to School” programs, adults – including parents, community members, business owners, teachers, and police – work together to escort and protect students as they walk to and from school. Many Safe Passage programs use a comprehensive approach: volunteers monitor street action before and after school; community organizations and school officials provide coordination and family support; teachers provide safety curricula in classrooms; and city officials make environmental and infrastructural changes to enhance community safety (i.e., demolishing vacant buildings, installing street lights, and removing graffiti).<sup>12,13,14</sup> **Chicago's Safe Passage program has led to a 20% decline in criminal incidents around Safe Passage schools, a 27% decrease in violent incidents among students, and a 7% increase in school attendance.<sup>15</sup>**



Members of the Chicago's Safe Passage program keep watch as students walk to school.

Source: *The New York Times*

The [STRIVE Action Council](#) is a multi-sector consortium of organizations that work at the national level to advance youth violence prevention efforts in states and communities. Action Council member organizations represent a variety of sectors, including public health, education, city and state leadership, and law enforcement, as well as youth-serving and social service sectors. Action Council organizations represent more than 1,000 affiliates and chapters and over 1 million fans and followers, all poised to champion youth violence prevention.

## LEARN MORE: REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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