

YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Training and Technical Assistance Initiative



HOUSTON, TEXAS

BUILDING ON EXISTING PREVENTION EFFORTS

Since 2011, Houston has been engaged in youth violence prevention (YVP) through a STRYVE (Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere) grant. In 2014, Houston expanded its efforts in this area by becoming a My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Challenge Community, aiming to improve opportunities for youth success and ultimately reduce violence and other crime among young men of color in the city. MBK continues the STRYVE work and adds a strong evaluation component. Because of the national attention and funding associated with it, MBK has elevated recognition for YVP efforts in Houston.

The Houston Health Department's (HHD) application for CDC's Youth Violence Prevention Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Initiative was a logical next step to help develop community-wide, comprehensive approaches to prevent youth violence.

Many Hands across Multiple Initiatives

Through STRYVE, a multisector coalition was formed consisting of representatives from faith-based organizations, local businesses, recreation agencies, child protective services, Keep Houston Beautiful, the Youth Participatory Action Research Council of the Houston Police Department, United Way, and YWCA. Efforts are currently under way to align the STRYVE work with My Brother's Keeper, the Youth Violence Prevention TTA Initiative, and other prevention programming to better integrate activities across projects. The Local Action Plan for MBK includes six Milestones for Success (www.mbkhoustan.org/milestones/). In alignment

with this initiative is Milestone 6 which aims to reduce crime and violence and provide a second chance by eliminating barriers to re-entry and encouraging fair chance hiring. This milestone engages multisector leadership in YVP through a collective impact framework that includes a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. Aaron Cano, lead for the Youth Violence Prevention TTA Initiative in the HHD Director's office, also serves as lead for Milestone 6 and as liaison between this milestone and Milestone 5, which focuses on ensuring youth are prepared to enter the workforce.

Youth Violence Context in Houston

The City of Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States with a population of about 2.3 million residents, of which more than one-quarter are youth under age 18. The majority of Houston's residents are Hispanic (44%).¹

Although 22% of Houston residents were living in poverty in 2013, more than one-third of children under the age of 18 were living in poverty.² In the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 18% of Texas high school students reported carrying a weapon and nearly 8% of students did not go to school because they felt unsafe.³ In Harris County, 7 in 10 homicides were firearm-related in 2012.³ Of the 900 firearm-related emergency room cases from September 2012 to August 2014, about 39% of patients were age 24 and younger.³

The Houston Health Department (HHD) and youth violence prevention coalition members are working to develop youth violence prevention infrastructure and capacity in District 14, which is comprised of five super neighborhoods that have high rates of juvenile crime, high school dropout, and other youth violence risk factors.⁴



One element of the MBK work is the Youth Advisory Council, which strives to develop a group of well-prepared youth who are able to overcome barriers linked with socioeconomic challenges and disparities. Youth are engaged in empowerment activities, neighborhood organization development, and programs that address major health risk factors, including substance abuse, dating violence, and youth violence.

In March 2016, as part of the Youth Violence Prevention TTA Initiative, HHD held the first Youth Justice Council meeting, bringing together representatives from law enforcement, justice, mental health, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and youth in the community. The council has met four times this past summer, and members are beginning to step into leadership roles. Members recently worked together to submit a winning application for a CDC grant: Preventing Teen Dating Violence and Youth Violence by Addressing Shared Risk and Protective Factors. Through this funding, they will work with the University of Texas Medical Branch to implement an intervention in target schools that pairs interpersonal intervention with community intervention to prevent teen dating violence. The potential to secure new funding is an incentive that helps bring partners to the table and generate enthusiasm for this effort.

Data to Inform Action

A range of data about youth violence and related risk and protective factors in Houston has been gathered, primarily through STRYVE and MBK. These data were used to create a Youth Violence and Prevention Profile, highlighting statistics about school safety, youth homicide, and other violence-related issues in the city and surrounding Harris County. The profile also offers action steps for youth, families, school personnel, and the community to curb youth violence, along with resources for learning more or getting involved.

Learning from the Community

Members of the Youth Justice Council participated in ride-alongs and data reviews with the police department, which helped to identify hotspots for youth violence and to see firsthand some of the environmental and contextual factors in high-risk communities that contribute to youth violence.

In addition, after learning more about the juvenile justice system, including a tour of a juvenile justice complex, HHD

Select Partners in Houston's Youth Violence Prevention TTA Initiative

- Houston Area Urban League (HAUL)
- Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, Inc.
- ProUnitas
- Houston Independent School District
- YWCA of Greater Houston
- Houston Police Department
- Houston Department of Public Works and Engineering
- University of Texas Prevention Research Center
- Harris County Juvenile Justice
- Mayor's Anti-Gang Office
- Texans Together
- Houston Parks and Recreation
- Sunnyside Pride
- MD Anderson Cancer Center
- United Way
- Houston-Galveston Workforce Board
- Children's Defense Fund

staff began discussing the possibility of offering probation services for juveniles in local neighborhoods, rather than requiring youth to travel downtown, which can present transportation challenges for some families. To that end, they have been exploring providing diversion and probation supervision services in some of the multi-service health centers.

Updating the Strategic Plan

When the Youth Violence Prevention TTA Initiative began, strategic plans were already in place for YVP as a result of the STRYVE and MBK work. In conjunction with Youth Violence Prevention TTA Center staff and guided by data, the Youth Justice Council is working to integrate the existing plans into one comprehensive plan to expand the scope and effectiveness of YVP efforts, with an emphasis on reaching the areas with the greatest need.

Houston is considering a few programs for its evidence-based interventions: Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES), which promotes pro-social behavior and gives youth opportunities to create change; Becoming a Man, a model from Chicago Public Schools for boys and young men of color who are acting out in school; and the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) program, which raises awareness of crime prevention and safety, promotes grassroots techniques and civic

engagement, and develops public-private partnerships to conduct clean-ups and beautification activities that improve community safety. CPTED, implemented through STRYVE, is expanding into additional high-risk neighborhoods.

Future Directions

In the coming year, Youth Violence Prevention TTA Center staff will support the Youth Justice Council in developing and communicating a solid understanding of the public health approach, establishing a formal process for shared

decision making, and expanding its membership, particularly to include more representatives of law enforcement, the business community, and policy makers. The Council will also work to identify new communities with higher rates of violence and explore opportunities for joint programming and activities. Another area to address in Houston is increasing outlets for youth voice in the community. This evidence-based multisector approach promises to make a significant impact on rates of youth violence in Houston. ■

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. QuickFacts: Houston city, Texas. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/4835000>

² Harris County Healthcare Alliance. The state of health in Houston & Harris County, 2015-2016. Retrieved from http://houstonstateofhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Houston_Harris_County_State_of_Health_2015-20161.pdf

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. High school YRBS: Texas 2013 results. Retrieved from <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/app/Results.aspx?TT=A&OUT=0&SID=HS&QID=QQ&LID=TX&YID=2013&LID2=&YID2=&COL=S&ROW1=N&ROW2=N&HT=QQ&LCT=LL&FS=S1&FR=R1&FG=G1&FSL=S1&FRL=R1&FGL=G1&PV=&TST=False&C1=&C2=&QP=G&DP=1&VA=CI&CS=Y&SYID=&EYID=&SC=DEFAULT&SO=ASC>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Injury Prevention & Control: Division of Violence Prevention, STRYVE Pilot Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/stryve/pilotcommunities.html>

