

Minneapolis Creates Blueprint to Prevent Youth Violence

Question

How were community leaders in Minneapolis able to apply their collective knowledge and lessons learned in preventing other health problems like sexually transmitted infections to prevent the epidemic of youth violence?

Challenge

Between 2003 and 2006, homicide was the leading cause of death for youth in Minneapolis between the ages of 15 and 24. Most of the 80 deaths that occurred during these years took place within five neighborhoods, a six mile square area of North Minneapolis. Stepping up police action in this area wasn't enough to significantly reduce youth homicides, so leaders began exploring other strategies. Both the private and public sectors needed to view the problem through a fresh lens. Community and city leaders reasoned that violence was not inevitable; indeed, it could be prevented. But, they recognized that a coordinated approach involving all aspects of the community would be needed to prevent youth violence in the city. A City Council member was the first to suggest the public health approach, a four step process used to solve health problems across the globe.

Solution

There was great community support for using a public health approach to prevent youth violence. The Health Department and the Minneapolis Foundation convened a group that spanned a wide range of ages, cultures, and neighborhoods to identify the city's strengths and gaps in violence prevention. They looked at youth arrest and detention data collected by the Minneapolis Police Department. These data defined what was happening and where it occurred. Next, they looked "upstream" for risk and protective factors to help understand how to prevent youth violence—what things increased or reduced the likelihood that a young person would or not be violent? For example, job skills and a connection with safe adult mentors could help protect a youth from violence. All of the factors people wanted to focus on—safety, family interactions, employment, a promising future—could be addressed through the umbrella of the public health approach. In 2006, the City Council adopted a resolution to declare youth violence as a public health issue. A multisector Steering Committee that included the Mayor, City Council, local foundations, healthcare and public health, schools, youth and families, parks, police, the county, non-profit agencies, neighborhood associations, and businesses formed to draw up the *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis*. The Steering Committee consulted local and national experts to gather input on proven and promising community driven practices for the Blueprint. Launched in 2008, the Blueprint provides a framework to coordinate the work of partners from all sectors. A multisector Executive Steering Committee oversees the implementation of the Blueprint.

Results

The partners track the success of their efforts with "Results Minneapolis." Each year, the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) chart progress on 18 distinct indicators that map to each aspect of the Blueprint. For example, MPS uses a survey of students to track six indicators to measure youth connection to trusted adults. Examples of the six indicators include student participation in after-school programs and extra-curricular activities and help from family members with homework. Factors like these protect youth from violence. The Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) also compiles data about youth arrests and detention. According to statistics released by MPD in fall 2010, the number of juvenile suspects has dropped 28 percent since 2008. Juvenile arrests have dropped by 18.4 percent

in the last two years. In part due to the contribution of the Blueprint, community groups and the city have been able to attract new funding from philanthropic and federal sources, including U.S. Justice Department funding for gang assessment and prevention. Minneapolis expanded the initiative from the original 5 neighborhoods to include 22 neighborhoods in 2009, and the state has mandated that the Minnesota Department of Health support this approach to youth violence prevention in additional Minnesota cities. By joining Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY), a component of CDC's Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE), a national effort to stop youth violence before it even starts, the city gets valuable technical assistance and networks with other cities on policy initiatives at the national level.

Highlights

The City of Minneapolis defined youth violence as a public health concern, and partners from the public and private sectors teamed up to create a Blueprint for Action to prevent youth violence based on a public health approach. The Blueprint is organized around four goals that span the continuum of prevention: 1) Connect every youth with a trusted adult; 2) Intervene at the first sign that youth are at risk for violence; 3) Restore youth who have gone down the wrong path; and, 4) Unlearn the culture of violence in our community. This approach has been so successful that the state will expand the Blueprint to more cities.

Quote

"By seeing youth violence as the public health crisis that it is, we are better able to work across agencies, communities and jurisdictions with youth, parents, teachers, clergy, health providers, and others to protect youth, reduce injuries and deaths, and prevent more acts of violence from ever happening in the first place." Blueprint for Action

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