

# Youth Voice & Engagement in Violence Prevention

How do we engage youth and incorporate their voice in our violence prevention research?

## Challenge

When the Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center (PCVPC) was established in 2006, PCVPC academic and community researchers believed it was imperative that youth be integrated into the research process at every stage to ensure that the products and strategies developed to impact youth violence in the community were authentic and tailored to the ways youth communicate in Philadelphia. PCVPC researchers were challenged to recruit interested youth, keep them engaged throughout the research process, and involve them in the research in meaningful ways. A focus of PCVPC's work from 2009 to 2011 was to include youth voice in the dissemination of research findings.



## Solution

Youth from the community provided insight on sharing the results of PCVPC research findings; at the same time, the youth received valuable educational opportunities related to their career interests. Knowledge transfer and co-learning like this form a cornerstone of Community Based Participatory Research. PCVPC academic and community researchers developed a plan to include youth in their research by organizing a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and a group of Youth Reporters. The YAB members were recruited from recreation centers and community partner sites in West and Southwest Philadelphia. With eight active members, the YAB gave feedback to PCVPC on research initiatives and dissemination plans such as print advertising and video animation. During YAB monthly meetings, youth learned skills such as resume writing, interview skills, and community activism. YAB members also participated in two community events focused on violence prevention and met with business executives from across Philadelphia to learn about opportunities to become involved in the community. The Center's Animation Research project team members conducted two youth focus groups to determine the best ways to deliver violence prevention messages to teens. PCVPC researchers also engaged youth in developing animated characters to share important, age-appropriate messages about violence prevention with youth in PCVPC's targeted community. Finally, two Youth Reporters were recruited to work with a local newspaper read by approximately 7,000 Southwest Philadelphia residents.



## Results

PCVPC successfully engaged youth from West and Southwest Philadelphia in defining effective ways to share research results with youth in its targeted community. YAB members chose anti-bullying as the topic of the PCVPC Annual Community Symposium, helped develop the symposium agenda, and gave input on print advertising and video animation for PCVPC messaging. Youth who participated in focus groups for the Animation Research project indicated that Facebook, YouTube, and digital animation were ideal dissemination methods for PCVPC research results. This feedback led to the development of two animated characters, Briana and Damon, who appear in eight storylines that communicate research findings using language relevant to youth. The two Youth Reporters also assisted with interviewing newspaper staff and developed three articles related to violence prevention and community engagement that were featured in the newspaper. The Youth Reporters learned about distribution, design, and layout of newspaper publishing. Consistent with a Community Based Participatory Research approach, PCVPC engaged community members who work and reside in the areas targeted by PCVPC as equal partners in all aspects of the youth violence prevention research process. PCVPC believes in the importance of translating research results into action, while also including youth voice. The youth who have been involved in PCVPC research and dissemination efforts have been integral to PCVPC's work. Youth were able to consistently influence the direction of the media outreach efforts through discussions, community events, and work with community leaders. Our youth partners have not only learned about research, but also learned about overall personal and professional development. Engaging youth from the community in the research process was a win-win scenario for PCVPC and all the youth involved.

## Highlights

The Youth Advisory Board, Animation Research project, and Youth Reporters have consistently influenced the direction of PCVPC's media outreach efforts through the participation of youth in project discussions, community events, and in collaboration with community leaders. Not only did they learn about research, but also had an opportunity to further develop their personal and professional skills.

"My experience as a youth reporter has had quite an impact on my view of community and the violence that occurs in it. Getting youth involved in the process to prevent violence in the community is key because we are living and breathing this violence and we know hands-on how it affects us."

- Kyshon Johnson

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