

Streetworkers, Youth Violence Prevention, and Peacemaking in Lowell, Massachusetts: Lessons and Voices From the Community

Shannon Frattaroli, PhD, MPH¹, Keshia M. Pollack, PhD, MPH¹, Karen Jonsberg¹, Gregg Croteau, MSW², JuanCarlos Rivera², and Jennifer S. Mendel¹

(1) The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Injury Research and Policy; (2) United Teen Equality Center

What Is the Purpose of This Study?

- To understand how the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) streetworker outreach program operates.
- To understand how streetworkers are perceived to affect youth violence in Lowell, Massachusetts.

What Is the Problem?

- Youth violence remains a serious problem for communities around the world.
- Streetworker programs are generally recognized as a promising strategy for preventing youth violence, especially gang-related violence, in the United States.
- There is scant information about how these programs hire, train, and manage streetworkers, and about how they do their job.
- Research is needed to guide decision making and program planning for streetworker programs that aim to prevent youth violence.

What Are the Findings?

- The streetworker program engages youth and the existing program's streetworkers in the hiring process when new streetworkers are being added to the team.
- Streetworkers undergo a comprehensive training program. Streetworkers value the training they receive and view it as directly relevant to their work.
- UTEC streetworkers outreach to youth, connect them with needed services (e.g., job, housing, health care), and intervene directly to prevent or mitigate violence.
- Streetworkers engage gang-involved youth who are in conflict in a structured peacemaking process.
- UTEC's Streetworker program maintains many productive partnerships with city agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the local business community. These partnerships facilitate streetworkers' ability to connect youth with resources.

Who Should Care Most?

- Individuals and organizations that are planning to start a streetworker program to address the needs of youth and reduce youth violence.
- Organizations with a streetworker program in place that are interested in learning about another streetworker program.
- Funders interested in supporting promising strategies for youth violence prevention.
- Researchers who are interested in streetworker programs as a youth violence prevention strategy.

Recommendations for Action

- Involve youth in the process of selecting streetworkers.
- Provide streetworkers with benefits and professional development opportunities to improve retention.
- Invest in quality training for new streetworkers, and in ongoing training for experienced streetworkers.
- Peacemaking processes are a logical complement to the streetworker skill set.
- Community partnerships are important to streetworker programs, and these relationships should be a priority.
- The Community Policy Brief is intended to inform community-based organizations, public health policy makers, and other individuals whose primary interest is not research, but who would be interested in the application and translation of research findings for practical purposes.