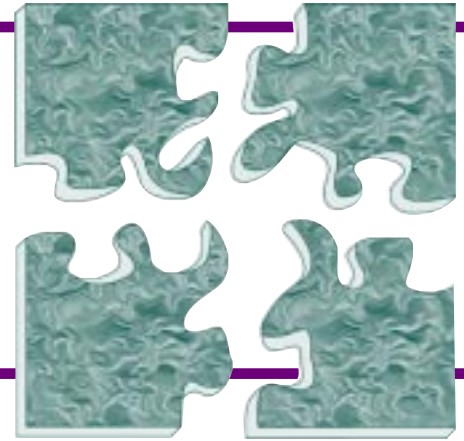


BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS



PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

THE BOSTON APPROACH p. 1

THE FRAMEWORK p. 2

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE p. 4

 Leadership p. 4

 Spreading the Message p. 5

 Building Partnerships p. 5

 Using Data p. 6

 Staying the Course p. 7

THE ELEMENTS OF CHANGE ... p. 7

 Building Assets p. 8

 Changing Job
 Responsibilities p. 9

 Police p. 9

 Health Providers p. 10

 Clergy p. 11

 Teachers/Schools p. 11

 Courts p. 11

LESSONS LEARNED p. 11

REFERENCES p. 12



**OUTREACH
PARTNERSHIPS**

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE BY YOUTH

This BEST PRACTICE BRIEF explores community pathways to the reduction of violence by youth, using the experience in Boston, Massachusetts, as an example.

HOW BOSTON CHANGED ITS CULTURE

Boston is one of a small number of cities across the country that are reducing violence by youth by making the effort a community partnership responsibility. Boston has been successful in applying what is known about violence by youth to reach at-risk youth and to deal effectively with those already in trouble. The multiple dimensions in Boston’s approach and the concurrent improvement in relationships between police and residents make its experience worth examining.

DIVIDENDS FROM THE BOSTON APPROACH

As a result of a concerted effort starting in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s and a targeted focus on deterrence in 1996, Boston experienced a reduction in the number of young homicide victims and offenders.

- 80 percent reduction in **homicides by juveniles** aged 17 and under (between 1990 and 1995) continuing to an irreducible minimum (0, 1)
- 63 percent reduction in **monthly homicide victims** aged 24 and under (1991–1995 compared with 1996–1998)
- 65 percent drop in the **juvenile arrest rate** for aggravated assault and battery with a firearm (between 1993 and 1995)
- 29 percent decrease in **violent crime incidents** (1991-1995)
- 22 percent decrease in **monthly number of youth gun assaults** in one of Boston’s highest risk neighborhoods (1996-1998)
- 20 percent decrease in **violent crime in public schools** (1995 to 1996 school year)

Boston Police Department letter for homicides by juveniles in recent years; D.M. Kennedy, A.A. Braga, A.M. Piehl, and E.J. Waring, (October 2001), *Research Report, Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project’s Operation Ceasefire*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. See www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf for homicide victims aged 24 and under and youth gun assaults; all other data from Major’s Public Safety Council, (September 1996), *Youth Violence: A Community-Based Response—One City’s Success Story*. See www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/boston.txt.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Boston experience can be viewed from three conceptual frameworks as a way of illuminating approaches to the prevention of violence by youth.

■ THE “TIPPING POINT” FOR OR AGAINST VIOLENCE

The importance of **Context** in creating a tipping point for or against violence was discussed in **BEST PRACTICE BRIEF** No. 22. This **BRIEF** outlines two other principles relevant to epidemics and social phenomena that can account for small but significant changes that can tip the balance.

■ **THE LAW OF THE FEW.** Social phenomena, as well as contagious diseases, can be precipitated or “spread” by the actions of a very few individuals—the gang leader, the committed citizen, or the crusading writer. The actions of a few persons can change a trajectory for good or ill. Those concerned should recognize that negative social trends can be reversed through the energy, knowledge, enthusiasm, social connections, and persuasiveness of a small number of people in a community.

There is no reason to think a small group of thoughtful committed citizens cannot change the world; indeed, that’s the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

■ **THE STICKINESS FACTOR.** Diseases often spread when some change makes the bacteria or virus “stick.” In social phenomena, this *Stickiness Factor* generally relates to the prevailing message communicated by the culture. Relatively simple changes in the framing of actions or the presentation of information can make a big difference in impact and resulting actions. The **Content** of the message may not be enough. A message is “sticky” only if it is **memorable** enough to move individuals and organizations.

■ *“Fight Crime: Invest in Kids” is a sticky message.*

■ *The Surgeon General’s report that “smoking is harmful to your health” triggered a sustained public health campaign that began to change public attitudes and behaviors about smoking. Once public attitudes were changed, laws were enacted that banned smoking in public places.*

These principles identify a **process** that can be used planfully for positive change.¹

■ THE COMPONENTS OF THE VIOLENT ACT

Targets for change can be identified by analyzing the three components of any violent act discussed in **BRIEF** No. 22: the **Agent** used; the **Environmental Context and Triggering Event**; the **Characteristics of the Individuals** involved.

■ THE ASSETS APPROACH TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The 40 assets identified by the Search Institute as protective against risky behavior suggest some dimensions of the **content for change**. Focusing on strengths rather than deficits, these assets can be summarized as follows:²

- connections with and support from adults
- boundaries and expectations
- constructive use of time
- empowerment
- educational commitment
- social competence
- values
- positive identity

¹ M. Gladwell, (2000), *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*, New York: Little, Brown and Co.

² For a more complete listing of the 40 assets, see Search Institute literature at www.search-institute.org.

BEGINNING EFFORTS

In 1982, a community-based, foundation-funded initiative that viewed violence by youth as a preventable public health problem began at Boston City Hospital, a unit of Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals. In 1986 this effort became known as the **Boston Violence Prevention Project**.³ The *Project* initiated two strategies.

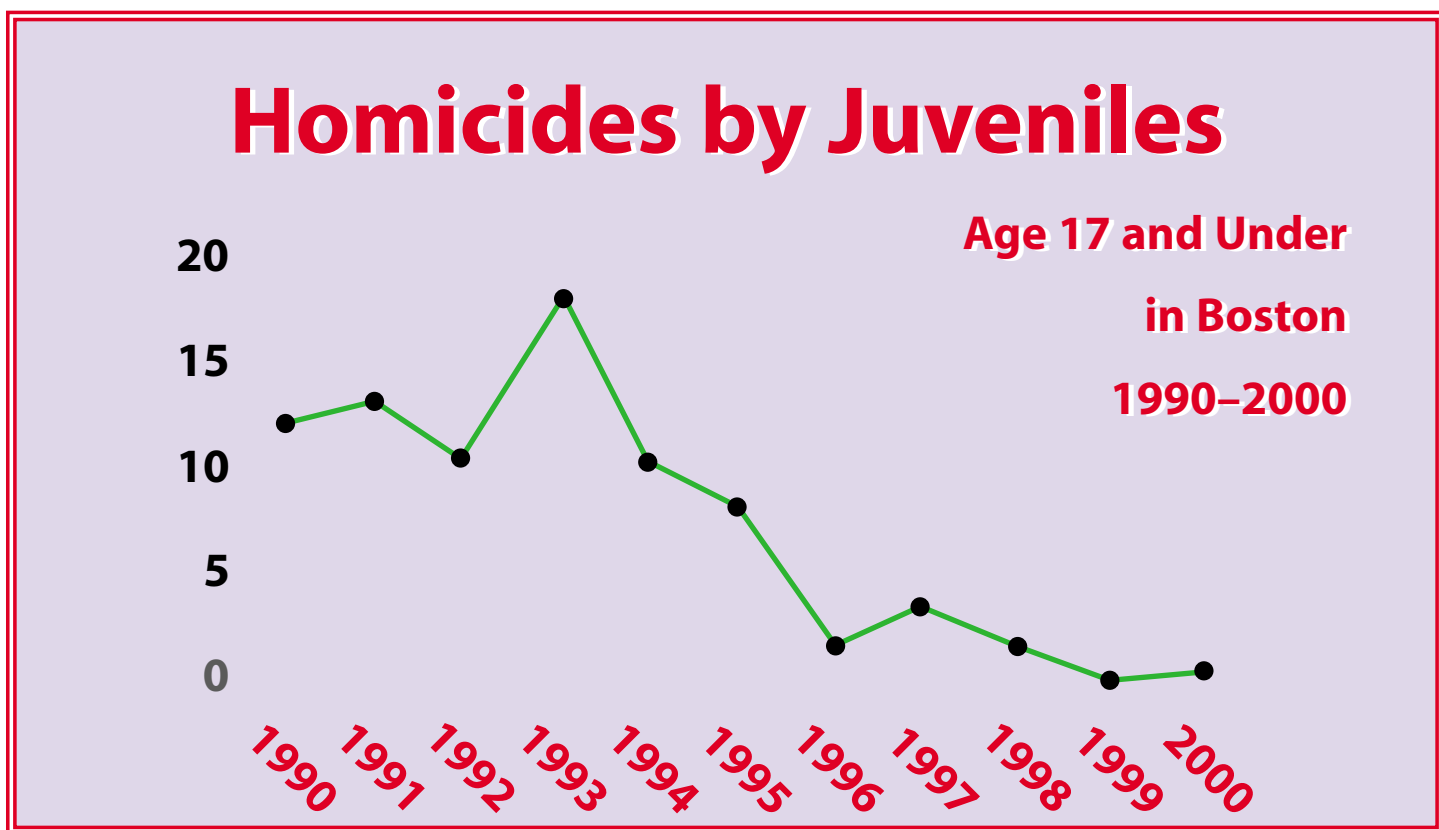
Strategy I was designed to change the attitudes of adolescents toward violence and reduce violent behavior by **training community service providers**. They would teach at-risk inner-city youth in their programs about the risks of violence and preventive measures to avoid being drawn into fights.⁴ The trainers came from YMCAs, church groups, health centers, Boys and Girls

Clubs, and tenants' organizations.

The basis for the training was a **high school violence prevention curriculum** for youth developed by Deborah Prothrow-Stith. She designed it to teach young people—especially inner city males—two important lessons:

- They are at risk of becoming both the perpetrators and the victims of violence.
- Violence is not inevitable; they do have choices.

The curriculum acknowledges that anger is a normal and even essential emotion. Its goal is to teach young people not to stifle their anger, but to channel it into constructive action.⁵



³ A.J. Hausman, H. Spivak, D. Prothrow-Stith, & J. Roeber, (1992), Patterns of Teen Exposure to a Community-Based Violence Prevention Project, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol.13, pp. 668-675. The *Boston Violence Prevention Project* later became the *Adolescent Wellness Center* at Boston City Hospital; it also generated the less locally oriented *Violence Prevention Program* at Harvard School of Public Health's Division of Public Health Practice.

⁴ The community-based project had its largest impact on the staff who provided young people with services. An evaluation study revealed that providers possessed attitudes about anger and violence that were quite similar to those of their young clients. Before attending the training, many believed that violence was an appropriate and often an inevitable response to human conflict. The training changed the youth workers' beliefs and attitudes toward violence and possibly changed the way the youth workers handle their own anger. Mayor's Public Safety Council, (September 1996), *Youth Violence: A Community-Based Response—One City's Success Story*. See www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/boston.txt.

⁵ D. Prothrow-Stith, (1991), *Deadly Consequences*, New York: Harper Collins. The Violence Prevention Curriculum can be obtained from the Education Development Center at www.edc.org

Two community organizers concentrated on training service providers in two poor neighborhoods with high homicide and injury rates: Roxbury (African-American) and South Boston (white). Based on the results of this pilot project, the Mayor of Boston made training of community service providers an integral part of the city's *Safe Neighborhoods Plan*.

This strategy targeted actual and potential perpetrators and victims in order to change thoughts and actions of individual youth. It developed the assets of problem solving and conflict resolution.

Strategy II involved a **mass media campaign**. In 1988, the Advertising Club of Greater Boston chose the *Boston Violence Prevention Project* as its public service campaign and designed *Friends for Life* public service announcements. The campaign sought to:

- raise public awareness of the problem of violence by youth and the consequences of violent behavior,
- help youth visualize the role of peer pressure in promoting violence and the responsibility that friends have for helping to defuse conflict situations, as well as the consequences of their behavior, and
- reinforce other violence prevention messages in the community.

This strategy targeted youth and the general public with sticky messages designed to change the culture.

Spanning these two strategies was a small Violence Prevention Club that recruited 20-25 high-risk youth—dropouts, prone to violence—to learn alternatives to violence through use of the curriculum. As peer leaders, they communicated that message through presentations to some 8,000 persons.

BROADER INITIATIVES

It became apparent that these early and limited responses to violence by youth were insufficient and that a broader public health and law enforcement approach to youth violence was needed. The community-wide effort in the '90s used a three-pronged public health primary/secondary/tertiary strategy to tackle the complex problem of violence by youth:

- **reinforce non-violent problem solving** for the vast majority of youth (Prevention)
- **intervene as early as possible** in the lives of young people who are at risk of violence (Intervention)
- **take tough, fair action** against those who commit violent crime (Enforcement)

Multiple promotion, prevention, intervention, and enforcement programs, directed at all children, at-risk youth, and those already in trouble with the law, are now a part of Boston's youth violence prevention mosaic.

What is most important, however, is not the particular mix of programs that Boston adopted to combat violence by youth, but the process and framework that brought about significant community and cultural change.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE



The Boston experience exemplifies essential components in the change process:

- Leadership
- Spreading the message
- Building community partnerships
- Using data to direct action

LEADERSHIP

THE LAW OF THE FEW

Violence, like other social problems, can be reversed through the energy, social connections, knowledge, persuasiveness, and enthusiasm of a small number of people in a community.

The presence in Boston of community leaders who were able to make things happen accounts for much of the success in Boston:

- two physicians who developed the *Boston Violence Prevention Project* (Deborah Prothrow-Stith, who subsequently promoted prevention of violence by youth from the Massachusetts State Department of Public Health and the Harvard School of Public Health, and Howard Spivak, responsible for adolescent health services at the Boston Department of Health and Hospitals)
- a minister (Eugene Rivers, who mobilized the African-American clergy after an adolescent was shot and stabbed in church)
- a police detective sergeant (Paul Joyce who piloted a communication/deterrence response to gang violence)
- university researchers (David M. Kennedy and colleagues who facilitated the collaborative problem solving that resulted in *Operation Ceasefire*)
- a mayor and a police chief (Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Police Commissioner Paul F. Evans, who have promoted interagency collaboration, engaged neighborhoods in planning and action, and recognized that youth development is an important part of the answer)

- law enforcement officials, social workers, business and community leaders who were willing to take up the challenge

These activists and policy makers demonstrate the Law of the Few.

AS A THIRD-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT

on a six-week surgical rotation at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Deborah Prothro-Stith stitched up a young man admitted to the emergency room with a knife wound over one eye—the result of a drunken argument. The victim told her: “Don't go to sleep—the guy who did this to me is going to be in here in about an hour, and you'll get all the practice stitching you need!” She recognized that if he had been suicidal, she would have had an obligation to consult a mental health professional. Yet, even though he was threatening to harm another and might be harmed himself in the process, her only obligation was to “stitch him up and send him out.” Believing that violence by youth is a learned, not inevitable, behavior and thus a solvable public health problem, she became an advocate for active prevention efforts.

D. Prothro-Stith, (1991)

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

THE STICKINESS FACTOR

Energizing activists and decision-makers and convincing a growing number of people lays the groundwork for action.

As part of the *Boston Violence Prevention Project*, Prothro-Stith and Spivak, as well as the youth workers and the youth that they trained, took the message that “violence is preventable” to policy makers and organizations through personal contacts and speaking engagements and training. Over the years these efforts reached thousands of professionals from Boston's schools, youth programs, human service and law enforcement agencies, faith-based and business organizations, and health services, as well as residents of public housing and youth.⁶

⁶ See, e.g., D. Prothro-Stith & H. Spivak, (November 24, 1996), *Turning the Tide on Violence*, *The Boston Sunday Globe*.

Initial media campaigns spread the message that violence is preventable. In addition to the *Friends for Life* public service announcements, a local television station conducted a *Stop the Violence* campaign. Beginning in 1995, a local hip-hop radio station sponsored a call-in show every six weeks called “Enough is Enough” designed to encourage youth to adopt non-violent ways of resolving conflict.

Together with the growing concern about crime and violence, the initial violence prevention message helped create the impetus for leadership response, the development of partnerships, and community support. The ultimate in “sticky” messages were the *Operation Ceasefire* communications to gangs concerning the inevitable law enforcement consequences if violence continued.

Initial messages to the public were convincing and memorable enough to move the Boston community to a continuing effort. Later communications to gangs were sufficiently powerful to change behavior.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

STRUCTURES ARE ESSENTIAL

Convincing people is half the battle. In addition, there have to be structures, in place or created, through which action can be taken.

With leadership and public receptivity to the message, the cornerstone of Boston's approach was the building of coalitions and partnerships among various community professionals and groups that had been going it alone or had not become involved at all. Professionals and neighborhood residents have been energized to develop numerous anti-violence initiatives. Coalitions have enabled agencies to coordinate services and to generate resources. Many of the coalitions and initiatives developed in response to various federal grant opportunities.

The police have engaged in multiple partnerships with other agencies in the community. Boston attributes a large part of its success to greatly increased communication between the various levels of law enforcement officials and with the community using a “community justice” approach. “Community justice” involves problem-solving—a process of identifying public safety problems, creating partnerships with all sectors of the community, and developing comprehensive solutions.

Through interconnecting partnerships, the Boston community has organized to reach at-risk youth with services, opportunities, and adult connections and to establish behavioral boundaries for those in gangs or already in the criminal justice system. Some initiatives have been citywide; others have been targeted to specific high-risk neighborhoods.

Among the significant structures that developed were:

- **The Boston Coalition** (1990–). The Coalition was organized by such agencies as the Boston Department of Health and Hospitals, the United Way, and the Bar Association and involved the city, police department, the schools, other community agencies, and business. With over 350 participants, the Coalition has served as a forum for sharing information and as a sponsor for various activities to reduce violence and fight substance abuse.
- **The Ten Point Coalition** (1992–). Clergy and lay members in faith-based organizations partner with the police and human service agencies in various initiatives.

the network of partnerships between citizens and government agencies, private organizations, and nonprofit service providers to identify, prioritize, and resolve neighborhood and crime-related problems.

Communication and recognition were initially facilitated by a monthly newsletter and a monthly breakfast for area professionals organized by the *Boston Violence Prevention Project* and continued by the city. An annual Peace Party recognition ceremony has honored persons who make significant contributions to the effort.

While many of the structures were initiated in the early '90s, much of the effort was not fully implemented until the election in 1993 of a reform administration that was committed to decreasing crime and improving the relationship between citizens and the police.



USING DATA TO DIRECT ACTION



USING STATISTICAL AND CITIZEN-GENERATED INFORMATION

Data enables agencies to understand the relationship to crime of weapons/individuals/environment, enabling them to target efforts and increase effectiveness.

ANALYZING DATA AVAILABLE FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES

The Boston Gun Project Work Force, with federal and foundation funding, engaged the collective experience and

- **The Boston Police Violence Strike Force** (1992–). A task force of local police works with individual county, state, and federal law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, on investigation and arrests for crimes.
- **The Boston Gun Project Work Force** (1995–). A consortium initiated by university professors focused on strategies to reduce the supply and demand for guns. Members included representatives from the *Boston Police Youth Violence Strike Force*, the county, state, and federal law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, and representatives of the *Streetworkers* (see p. 8).
- **The Office of Community Partnerships** (1993–). This unit of city government facilitates

brainpower of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, community activists, and professors from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government to understand the supply and demand for guns among youth and to develop an effective strategy. A careful analysis of juvenile homicide and emergency room data identified the location of homicides and characteristics of perpetrators and victims, concluding that 60 percent of Boston's homicides aged 24 and under were gang-driven, involving less than 1 percent of the city's youth population. Geographic mapping of gang territories and the alliances and disputes between gangs identified three primary neighborhoods of concern. Experience in defusing the violent activities of one gang—communicating that violence must stop and following up with strict law enforcement—formed the basis for *Operation Ceasefire* (see page 10).

The *Project* identified where youth were illegally acquiring guns by analyzing data from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and gun purchase information obtained by the police from offenders. This information was used to shape a crackdown on Massachusetts dealers selling guns to minors.⁷

- The *Boston Police Youth Violence Strike Force* developed a comprehensive ongoing computer database on the location and characteristics of juvenile crime to guide enforcement efforts.

ASKING THE RESIDENTS

Comprehensive Communities Program and Safe Neighborhood Initiative. In 1994–1996 and again beginning in 1999, the city undertook neighborhood-based strategic planning. By identifying and acting on the concerns of citizens, the city proposed to reduce crime and fear of crime and thereby improve the quality of life.

- *The Comprehensive Communities Program* brought together strategic planning teams organized city-wide, by district, and by function.
- In the *Safe Neighborhood Initiative*, residents of four high-crime, low-income neighborhoods worked with law enforcement and governmental officials on advisory councils to identify and prioritize neighborhood and crime-related problems as the basis for a strategic action plan to meet community needs. As one outcome, neighborhood tip lines enable community members to notify police of suspicious activity. Also, law enforcement agencies use civil law to target situations that are generating fear and victimization in neighborhoods but that cannot be handled adequately through criminal statutes.

This involvement empowered neighborhood residents, obtained their participation in defining the issues, and developed productive relationships with the police.

MAKING THE COMMITMENT TO STAY THE COURSE

THERE MAY BE NO QUICK FIX

The cumulative weight of leadership, sticky messages, and structure can create a tipping point over time. Changing an environmental context can bring rapid results, but changing people's attitudes and actions through a change in culture takes longer.

⁷ See www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gun-violence/profile02.html; www.rwjf.org/health/028959s.htm; D.M. Kennedy, A.A. Braga, A.M. Piehl, and E.J. Waring, (October 2001), *Research Report, Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. See www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf.

The many components of the Boston mosaic were implemented in phases, by numerous individual groups and coalitions, and in various locations. Their cumulative impact was sufficient to change community behaviors enough to show dramatic reductions in violence.

Changing the culture of a community with respect to violence is not a short-term project. It took 25 to 30 years of deliberate and sustained efforts to make smoking less culturally and socially acceptable. Violence, a more complex social problem, may take even longer to curb. Moreover, under current cultural conditions and given the new cadres of youth each year, violence can be described as a recurrent “epidemic” that will need a sustained response.

As an analogy, many infectious diseases—polio, measles, whooping cough—have been virtually wiped out through immunizations. However, without persistent pressure to ensure that all children have timely access to vaccines and that all parents understand the importance of vaccinations, the level of immunity drops and outbreaks occur.

Making the commitment to stay the course requires attention to **sustainable funding**. If funding comes predominantly from time-limited governmental and foundation grants, effective initiatives risk losing staff and curtailing services at the end of the grant period.

Boston has received extensive federal grants—taking advantage, for example, of the Bureau of Justice Assistance *Comprehensive Communities Program* and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention *Safe Futures*, as well as other federal grant programs from the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Education, and Health and Human Services. However, state funds, city resources, business contributions, and foundation grants have also been significant. Boston has used ongoing city, county, and state governmental resources and the redefinition of job responsibilities to develop and sustain services.

THE ELEMENTS OF CHANGE

Active law enforcement involving collaboration across agencies⁸ has been a significant ingredient in the Boston approach. In addition, Boston has incorporated an assets approach to youth and creativity in redefining and expanding the job responsibilities—and therefore the behavior—of police and other professionals.

⁸ One such collaboration not mentioned in the text, *Operation Safe House*, involved local, state, and federal enforcement agencies and the housing authority in suppressing drug trafficking and violent crime in housing projects.

BUILDING ASSETS IN YOUTH

Assets in youth are being built in Boston, as part of the effort to prevent violence by youth, through the increase in opportunities that have developed for:

- connections between adults and youth,
- opportunities to experience the wider world and/or to build skills, and
- access to needed services and resources.

These activities have been undertaken by the city, the police and other law enforcement agencies, schools, community organizations, the universities, and businesses. In addition, the youth development infrastructure has been strengthened through early childhood programming, health initiatives, school reform, and community schools.⁹

A network of 42 comprehensive **Boston Community Centers** has been established by the city, each run by an independent, nonprofit council. Now the city's largest single source of human services, the Centers offer youth and families services that include after-school recreation and tutoring, and counseling services, as well as child care and adult education. Many centers are open evenings and weekends. Some employ youth peer leaders as well as an adult youth worker. The city provides the primary funding for the centers, many of which use school buildings after hours.¹⁰



INCREASED CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth workers access at-risk youth from multiple locations—the *Boston Community Centers*, the Boston Housing Authority's low income housing, district police stations, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.

- **Streetworkers** employed by the city are attached to the *Boston Community Centers* and to high schools. Approximately 30 to 50 of these youth workers go out daily around the clock to connect with gang members and hard-to-reach high-risk youth on the streets and in their homes. The streetworkers, many of whom are former gang

members, mediate disputes, help youth gain access to appropriate services, advocate for youth in the courts, and help the probation department with supervision. Training was underwritten by the *Boston Coalition*. Good working relationships with the police allow for exchange of information that has been significant in the reduction of gang violence.

- **The Ten Point Coalition** of clergy and lay leaders facilitated use of churches in Dorchester as drop-in centers for troubled youth in an "Adopt a Gang" program.

EXPANDED ACCESS TO SERVICES

- **The Youth Service Providers Network**

(1996–) A partnership between youth-serving organizations and the police created a network of services in three neighborhoods. Police can call a social worker based at the stationhouse to access services for teen runaways, dropouts, mentoring, job training and placement, emergency housing, and tutoring. The *Network* was organized under a grant from the *Comprehensive Communities Program*.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILL-BUILDING

After-school and summer opportunities for training and jobs have been developed by police-city-school-business-university partnerships.

- The city has employed youth in summer jobs through the Parks and Recreation Department, the private industry council, and the anti-poverty agency—reaching as many as 11,000 youth one year.
- After-school programming through the Boys and Girls Clubs has been provided by the *SafeFutures Initiative* in three high-risk neighborhoods.¹¹
- Career and educational alternatives for youth turning away from gangs and crime have been developed by the U.S. Attorney's Office, partnering with employers and job training programs.

⁹ For example, full service schools with health, social services, and enrichment programs were developed in two high schools with the involvement of the county district attorney's office and the Boston Police Department.

¹⁰ See www.aenc.org/BCC/BCC-BostonYouth.html.

¹¹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, (November 2000), *Comprehensive Response to Youth at Risk. Interim Findings from the SafeFutures Initiative: Summary*. See www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary-comp-reso/chepl.html.

- School-to-work programs are in place in every high school, providing internships and job shadowing directed at both out-of-school and in-school youth.
- ***The Summer of Opportunity Program*** (1994–). In a mentoring and training partnership between police, an insurance company, and a university, at-risk youth receive summer training in job readiness, leadership, and life skills. Those who successfully complete the training program are placed in part-time jobs with the requirement that the youth continue to attend school with passing grades.
- Mentoring and educational programs in the high schools and summer jobs in legal settings have been promoted by the Bar Association.

Opportunities for youth leadership and youth recognition

- ***A Mayor's Youth Council*** with representatives from every neighborhood operates an information and referral and personal advice telephone line. The Council also conducts a Mayor's Youth Summit annually, providing an opportunity for city officials to hear the key issues and concerns from youth throughout the city.

Opportunities for building skills and competence

- More than 100 organizations have provided **training for peer leaders and peer mediators.**
 - Training youth in peer mediation has been undertaken in high and middle schools.
 - A *Words not Weapons* program recruits a representative group of students including those who have had trouble in the past to tackle aspects of the school and community environment that lead to violence.¹²
- **Community-based educational, recreational, and arts activities** are underwritten by city assignment of small grants to more than 100 locations.

Activities promoting the anti-violence message were developed, e.g.,

- A teen theatre group added violence prevention to its repertoire.
- Boys and Girls Clubs developed Friends for Life Clubs.

CHANGING THE JOB RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POLICE

The police have redesigned the way they relate to youth—operating collaboratively with other agencies, making personal connections with youth, connecting youth to resources and opportunities, and establishing clear boundaries and consequences for violent behavior.

- **Youth programs unique to each police precinct** have been developed. Police in various locations sponsor after-school work for youth in the neighborhood: internships in the stationhouse; teen police academies; basketball and football leagues, martial arts, and other recreation programs; bicycle safety training.¹³
- **Community policing** (1994–). The placement of specific officers consistently in the same neighborhood has provided the opportunity for police to establish relationships with youth. The *Streetworkers* trained the police in contacting and connecting with youth.
- **District Community Service Officers**, as part of the *Youth Service Providers Network*, work out of some police stationhouses where they receive referrals of at-risk youth from the police.
- **Child Witness to Violence Project** (1993–). The Boston Medical Center, Department of Pediatrics, has trained police to refer children who have witnessed violence to appropriate agencies.¹⁴
- **Home visits** to at-risk youth and their parents are undertaken by police together with clergy.
- **School- and community-based Justice Program.** In a collaborative and coordinated effort, school officials, police, prosecutors, and youth service and social service professionals meet to share information about high-risk and adjudicated youth, prioritize cases, devise individualized intervention strategies, and provide oversight and sanctions as needed.

¹² Harvard School of Public Health, Division of Public Health Practice, Violence Prevention Programs, (1998), *Peace by Piece: A Violence Prevention Guide for Communities*, Boston, MA.

¹³ Boston Police Department, *Annual Report 1999*.

¹⁴ See www.bostonchildhealth.org.

- **The Boston Police Youth Violence Strike Force** 1992–. A task force of local, state, and federal agencies concerned with policing and criminal justice through the broader **Boston Gun Project Work Force** put into effect an organized strategy of deterrence and enforcement to reduce youth-related gang violence:

- **Operation Ceasefire** 1996–1998 was designed to deter juvenile and gang firearm violence by clear communication of limits and strict enforcement should violence occur. Teams of police, probation officers, prosecutors, streetworkers, and clergy targeting one gang at a time, communicated a zero tolerance policy for violence, through a formal forum and informal contacts, warning of the consequences if violence continued. *Streetworkers* offered employment and access to other resources and services. Gang members resorting to violence incurred arrests for public drinking, motor vehicle violations, outstanding warrants, noncompliance with probation, etc.

- **Operation Night Light** (1992—). Police and a probation officer make unannounced visits each night to the homes of 10 to 15 youths on probation to ensure that they are complying with curfew, school attendance, and substance abuse treatment and to involve their parents. The result has been an increase in compliance with probation requirements and a decrease in violence by probationers.

- *The Boston Police Youth Violence Strike Force* has also worked with social service agencies to raise funds for summer programs for at-risk youth.

CHANGING JOB RESPONSIBILITIES OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS

One of the essential elements of the public health approach in Boston has been to expand the responsibility for the reduction of violence beyond the police to other professionals who come into contact with parents and adolescents. The premise is that non-law enforcement professionals can use their day-to-day contacts to reinforce nonviolent behavior.

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS—EXPANDING RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Hospitals. More comprehensive response to adolescents suffering injury from gunshot or stab wounds** was a primary objective of the *Boston Violence Prevention Project*.¹⁵

¹⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that homicides may have been reduced by better routing of ambulances resulting in quicker arrival at emergency rooms and more effective treatment of injured juveniles.

- Beginning in 1990, Boston City Hospital has provided violence prevention counseling, the development of a safety plan, and followup of adolescents admitted to the hospital.¹⁶

- **BostonCares for Injured Youth.** Four hospitals in Boston utilize an Injury Service Coordinator who takes referrals from hospital social workers of children and youth treated for injuries related to youth violence. She links them to staff connected to the *Youth Service Providers Network*, the *Boston SafeFutures Initiative*, the *Streetworkers* and other agencies. Her involvement may include home visits, providing cab vouchers or bus passes, and reminder phone calls.¹⁷



- **Primary care physicians** in a neighborhood health center

- routinely ask about and counsel parents on appropriate discipline, the television viewing habits of their children, and gun safety in the home; and

- routinely ask in physical examinations of adolescents about depression, parental violence, street fights, inability to walk away from fights, dating violence, and forced sexual activity.

These are seen as legitimate medical concerns. Anticipatory guidance covers consequences, alternatives, and coping strategies.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hausman, Spivak, Prothrow-Stith, & Roeber.

¹⁷ See www.ci.boston.ma.us/safefutures/webthoughts.asp.

¹⁸ P. Stringham & M. Weitzman, (1988), Violence Counseling in the Routine Health Care of Adolescents, *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, Vol. 9, pp. 389-393. Obstetricians and primary care physicians as a part of prenatal care could also ask pregnant women about their experience of domestic violence.

CLERGY—EXTENDING ACTIVITIES

- **Training on issues of domestic violence**, underwritten by the *Boston Coalition*, has enhanced the clergy's counseling skills.
- **The Ten Point Coalition** in Dorchester mobilized the faith community to
 - train pastors and lay people in working with at-risk youth
 - initiate neighborhood crime watch programs
 - establish relationships with community-based health centers to provide counseling for families during times of crisis
 - establish rape crisis drop-in centers, services for battered women, and a counseling program for abusive men
 - develop partnerships with suburban and downtown churches

TEACHERS AND THE SCHOOLS—EXPANDING CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

- **Creative Conflict Resolution Program.** Teachers, counselors, and administrators in grades K-12 have been trained in modeling appropriate behavior in the classroom, skills training of students, and integrating concepts related to conflict resolution and violence prevention into the curriculum.
- **The Louis D. Brown Peace Curriculum** (1994–) for tenth graders in almost all high schools teaches the value of peace through the story of a young man who was shot down by gang gunfire. Class discussion, reading, essay writing, and community field projects are utilized.
- **PeaceZone** (2000–). A 16-lesson skill-building curriculum, covering self-control, problem solving and conflict resolution, is being installed in elementary schools. The curriculum is a project of Harvard School of Public Health's *Violence Prevention Center* in partnership with two foundations and the Boston Public Schools.
- **The Barron Assessment and Counseling Center** is maintained by the Boston Public Schools for youth referred for fighting or other violations of the school's discipline code. The Center serves as a short-term alternative classroom for the 5 to 10 days required for tests, counseling, and service planning.¹⁹

THE COURTS—PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES

- **The Alternatives to Incarceration Network.** The courts and other criminal justice agencies in

a partnership with service providers divert first time and nonviolent youth offenders from incarceration to increased monitoring and rehabilitation including substance abuse counseling, job skills training and placement, life skills counseling, and violence prevention training. This has been part of the *Comprehensive Communities Program* grant.

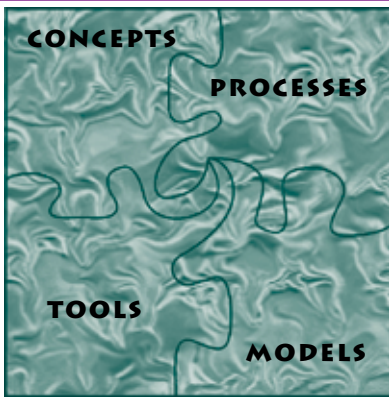
- **Conflict resolution training for domestic violence offenders** is utilized by the Dorchester District Court as a part of sentencing. The Court has also taken an active role to increase professional and public awareness.

LESSONS LEARNED

Does the Boston experience translate to other areas? Boston is a large city; the violence issues primarily concerned homicides by gangs in inner city neighborhoods. What has made the Boston experience memorable is the pervasiveness of the effort that has encompassed all sectors and has enhanced, rather than diminished, respect for the police.

- The Boston effort has been a mosaic of multiple structures, collaborative relationships, new initiatives as well as ongoing services, involving numerous players.
- Collaboration and partnerships within the law enforcement sector and across all community sectors—neighborhood residents, churches, businesses, social service agencies, schools, government agencies, universities, and the media—undergird the process, resulting in shared information and resources, joint strategic planning, and coordinated action.
- Strong leadership from the Mayor and the Police Commissioner has energized the ongoing effort, reinforcing with a common vision what initially started as discrete activities.
- Redefining job responsibilities has been as important as new initiatives.
- A mosaic of funding sources has supported the mosaic of services.
- Neighborhood residents have had a strong voice and role.
- Data-based problem solving has resulted in targeted action.
- A strength-based, asset-oriented approach has permeated prevention, intervention, and enforcement activities across the population of youth.

¹⁹ Harvard School of Public Health, p. 20.



BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS are a product of **OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS @ Michigan State University**, connecting university resources to the community. **BRIEFS** are reviewed by participating faculty, **OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS** staff, and an Advisory Group of potential users. Responsibility is assumed by Betty Tableman, Editor, at 517-432-7138, or e-mail: tableman@msu.edu.

BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS may be printed and distributed and may be quoted with citation of the source. Copyright © 2002 by University Outreach, Board of Trustees of Michigan State University.

WRITE OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, ROOM 6, KELLOGG CENTER, EAST LANSING 48824 OR CALL 517-432-2500 OR E-MAIL: ASSETS@MSU.EDU FOR INFORMATION ON ASSETS TRAINING, EVALUATION, OR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

COMING—No. 25.
Validating the Assets Approach to Youth Development

- Making face-to-face connections with youth has been emphasized.
 - Strong communication of limits and enforcement of consequences, while providing alternatives, has reduced violence on the street of inner city neighborhoods.
 - While there have been dramatic changes in the short-run, the effort is clearly understood as a long-term change in the environment for children and youth.
- There are clearly aspects to this experience that should be pondered in other large and small communities.

REFERENCES

PUBLICATIONS

- AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, Task Force on Violence. (1999). The Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention in Clinical Practice and at the Community Level. *Pediatrics*, Vol.103 (1), pp. 1273-1281.
- HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, Division of Public Health Practice, Violence Prevention Programs. (1998). *Peace by Piece: A Violence Prevention Guide for Communities*. 718 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.
- PROTHROW-STITH, DEBORAH. (1991). *Deadly Consequences*. New York: Harper Collins.

WEBSITES

- BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT. *Annual Report, 1999*. On www.bostonpolice.org.
- HEYMAN, PHILIP B. (2000). *Grant Results Report: Case Studies of Cities Approach to Reduce Youth Violence*. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. See www.rwjf.org/health/0289595.htm.
- KENNEDY, D.M., BRAGA, A.A., PIEHL, A.M. & WARING, E.J. (October 2001). *Research Report, Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. National Institute of Justice. See www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf.
- MAJOR'S PUBLIC SAFETY COUNCIL. (September 1996). *Youth Violence: A Community-based Response: One City's Success Story*. See www.ncjrs.org/textfiles/boston.txt.
- MENINO, MAYOR THOMAS M. (September 30, 1999). *The Boston Story: Making a Difference for Children and Youth. A Report to the National Press Club*. See www.boston.k12.ma.us/textonly/bps/bstory.asp.
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (February 1999). *Promising Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence*. Washington, D.C. Profiles 2,10, 21, 33, 35, 46, 58. See www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gun-violence/profile02.html.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This **BEST PRACTICE BRIEF** was written by BETTY TABLEMAN and PATRICIA SORENSON with contributions and review by Michigan State University faculty and engagement specialists: CHRISTOPHER MAXWELL, School of Criminal Justice; MARGUERITE BARRATT, Institute of Children, Youth and Families; BOB BROWN, Outreach Partnerships; DAVID KNAGGS, School of Social Work; JOHN MELCHER, Urban Affairs Center; CELESTE STURDEVANT REED, Outreach Partnerships and Institute for Children, Youth and Families; and with appreciation for the contributions from HOWARD SPIVAK, M.D., New England Medical Center; DAVID CIRIELLO, Boston Police Department; and DEBORAH STRONG, Children's Trust Fund. Graduate assistants CHRISTA ROBINSON and ELIZABETH BETHARD.

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity institution.