

A Policy Agenda For Youth Violence Prevention in New Mexico

Background

Youth violence prevention has reached new levels of concern and support, as violent acts by and against youth continues to expand in number and reach. Once thought to be an urban issue, the prevalence expands into rural communities and reservations at a rate that requires intentional action. On April 27-28, 2006 the New Mexico State Department of Health Office of Injury Prevention and the New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community convened members of the Violence Free Youth Partnership (the Partnership) and the Youth Violence Prevention Network (the Network) to engage in a strategic planning process that would lead to a set of Strategic Intentions toward mitigating youth violence in New Mexico. The strategic intentions will also guide the Partnership and communities across New Mexico in increasing awareness around the issue of youth violence.

The individuals convened for this process were identified as key stakeholders in NM for supporting youth violence prevention because of their interest and valued work in youth violence prevention. Careful consideration was taken to include urban *and* rural communities, Native American *and* Hispanic communities, volunteer community members, state department representatives, a deacon, and most importantly youth. It is a goal of the strategic plan to insure that all communities in New Mexico will be able to implement this document based on the diverse group of individuals that were present for the planning process.

The group's work built upon the Children's Cabinet Outcomes and Report Card. The Children's Cabinet is a working group of the 11 state departments that work most closely on children's issues. It is charged with assessing how New Mexico is doing based on the following five vital outcomes:

- All NM Children, Youth & Families will be Valued Contributors & Active Participants In their Communities.
- All NM Children & Youth will be Ready For – and Successful In – School
- All NM Children & Youth will be Able to Transition Successfully to Employment & Adulthood
- All NM Children & Youth will be Safe & Supported in Communities
- All NM Children & Youth will be Physically & Mentally Healthy

In addition, the group's work was informed by the New Mexico Youth Violence Report Card, which is a detailed assessment of current indicators (risk and resiliency factors), data sources, statewide policies (statutory or other), and currently available resources (programs and services) as they relate to youth violence in New Mexico.



Seven Strategic Intentions Identified

A two-day strategic planning session addressed the question:

“What are the uniquely effective actions essential in 2-3 years that will raise awareness and increase participation by individuals, institutions, and organizations involved in positive youth development as well as reduce violence among youth, considering the State Report Card on Youth Violence and its risk and resiliency factors, youth voice, law enforcement, etc.”

Seven strategies were identified to provide direction for the Violence Free Youth Partnership:

- Create intergenerational partnerships that help heal communities
- Connecting, inspiring and equipping young people to become leaders
- Establish a network of youth and adults to help educate everyone to lead, learn, heal, and make positive healthy choices.
- Create meaningful activities with youth for youth and by youth that facilitates education and entertainment in a safe place/haven
- Strengthen community and school collaborations to educate students to better their communities
- Jumpstart educational outreach through use of technology and research
- Educate all levels of policy makers to the current realities of youth violence in NM and guide them toward solutions

Policy Implications

This policy brief focuses on the last of these strategies: ***to educate and raise awareness of all***

levels of policy makers to the current realities of youth violence in New Mexico and to guide them toward a public health- oriented solution.

Policy-makers include: local, state and national elected officials; public administrators; principals; school board members; and tribal officials. While many policy-makers are informed and effective advocates for youth violence prevention efforts in New Mexico, many others are unaware of the extent of the problem, or are unfamiliar with the reasons for and effectiveness of a public-health approach to youth violence prevention. Many policy-makers may not even be aware that they are affected by the “problem” or are part of the “solution.”

Public Health Approach to Preventing Youth Violence

The principles of public health provide a useful framework for both continuing to investigate and understand the causes and consequences of violence and for preventing violence from occurring through primary prevention programs, policy interventions and advocacy. The activities of the Violence Free Youth Prevention are guided by the scientifically-tested and proven principles and recommendations described in the World report on violence and health. This public health approach to violence prevention seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence.



The approach consists of four steps:

- To define the problem through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence.
- To establish why violence occurs using research to determine the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that could be modified through interventions.
- To find out what works to prevent violence by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions.
- To implement effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings. The effects of these interventions on risk factors and the target outcome should be monitored, and their impact and cost-effectiveness should be evaluated.

Policy Action Agenda

To successfully implement this strategy requires a concerted and coordinated action agenda, including the following.

- ◆ *Identify and prepare youth-adult teams as youth violence prevention educators and advocates*
 - Partner with the NM Youth Alliance to identify youth in communities who are affected by violence to be trained as policy advocates around issues of Youth Violence Prevention
 - Identify and train adults and youth to share power in order to co-facilitate community conversations around youth violence prevention
 - Youth/Adult Partnership Trainings conducted
- ◆ *Facilitate community conversations with policy-makers to develop a community strategy for addressing youth violence prevention.*
 - Determine nature and message of community Conversations

- Schedule and facilitate community members in 10 regions in New Mexico
- Publish strategies identified in community conversations
- ◆ *Develop youth violence prevention policy agenda for: Local school districts, Municipalities/ Counties, State legislatures and agencies, and Tribal communities*
 - Identify policy recommendations emerging from community conversations
 - Compile and publish local, district, tribal and state policy agenda
- ◆ *Identify, prepare and support advocates and “champions” to move these agenda forward*
 - Identify and convene advocates to align policy agenda and efforts to support a comprehensive approach to youth violence prevention in New Mexico
- ◆ *Track progress towards implementing policies and accomplishing outcomes*
 - Maintain a database on policy efforts and results at the local, district, tribal, state levels
 - Create and maintain a current web-based inventory of existing youth violence prevention programs
 - Monitor outcomes and update the New Mexico Youth Violence Report Card



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