

Overview of Rochester's Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs

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Researchers at the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) engaged in phone interviews and website reviews with Rochester-based programs and service providers to examine which programs address street and gang violence. Community-based violence intervention programs, outside of law enforcement, are of great interest to Rochester and other urban communities. Some have been shown to be effective at reducing levels of serious violence (i.e. gang and gun-involved violence) at lower costs than law enforcement. Implementation, though, is often difficult, programs vary in focus and effectiveness, and there are often multiple programs in a city addressing similar issues or people. CPSI is involved in ongoing efforts in Rochester to identify, implement, and study promising community-based violence intervention programs. This paper serves as the first step in cataloging the many programs in Rochester that attempt to address urban violence. CPSI is committed to continuing to catalog local anti-violence efforts. If any readers have information that may contribute to our efforts, please contact us via the contact information provided on the cover page.

In this paper, a non-random selection of programs was compared and contrasted in an effort to see what types of services the community already has to address violence and what services the community is lacking. Our primary focus was to see if there were crisis intervention programs that aim to prevent violence that may happen in the near future and targeted intervention programs that address individuals showing signs of risk for involvement in violence. However, in doing so, we found that some programs more appropriately fall into the general prevention category. Our review was not meant to provide an extensive list of general prevention programs because general prevention is a broad umbrella category that entails a lot of programs. This paper is also not inclusive of every program in the City of Rochester. It is, however, a guide to what kinds of programs are offered in the community.

We catalog these services on a violence services spectrum. Some services focus on long-term prevention, while others provide short-term crisis intervention. General prevention services consist of services open to everyone, without a specific target population. Targeted prevention is for individuals that may present signs of increased chance for involvement in violence and need for additional services, such as programs for youth with truancy or behavior concerns. Crisis intervention becomes prevalent when a violent situation has occurred or is imminent and deals with intervention in violence to either prevent violence or its escalation. In this paper, we describe the various programs and services, beginning with the general prevention services.

General Prevention Services

We classified the following programs as general prevention because their services are applicable to the entire community, though they may focus on the issue of violence. The M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence is a Rochester-based program that seeks to educate the community on peaceful ways to reduce and prevent violence in the community. They help individuals develop conflict resolution, empathy, and leadership skills and also help them to do more critical thinking about situations before reacting. These skills are generally taught in workshops and trainings. This program collaborates with several community groups, schools, libraries, churches, neighborhood associations, and student groups at local colleges on various events, trainings, community youth programming, neighborhood cleanups, and race dialogues. They also open up their space for other programs in the city to use. M.K. Gandhi Institute of Nonviolence helps reduce the likelihood of violence occurring in the community by helping people develop skills to address and deal with violence. Because they broadly aim to teach the general public about nonviolence techniques, we classify them as a general prevention program.

Prevention Service is a program under the Community Place of Greater Rochester. They work to help young adults between the ages of 12 and 20 to stop or prevent gambling and substance abuse. Their services include crisis intervention, group facilitation, individualized counseling, and intervention. In addition, they also do presentations and outreach in the community to help identify and reach out to youth that are struggling with substance abuse and gambling. They work with schools in Rochester and receive referrals for at-risk youth from FACIT (Family and Community Intervention Team), Rochester Police Department (RPD), and Monroe County Probation. By focusing on underlying issues such as drugs and gambling, Prevention Services helps prevent the likelihood of violence occurring, as substance abuse is sometimes a risk factor for involvement in violence. However, their ultimate goal is to decrease substance and gambling abuse amongst youth. While they conduct crisis intervention for some situations, they do not specifically target violence and thus are more of a general violence prevention program.

Teen Empowerment is a youth-facilitated program that works closely with the Southwest Quadrant community of Rochester. The youth organizers and staff organize the community around various issues such as violence, youth employment, and police/community communication to try to create a variety of solutions. . They believe that the power of dialogue,

relationships, and continuous interaction with the community are powerful violence preventers. Teen Empowerment staff attend school dismissals to help ensure there are no fights or violence taking place. Their services are focused on the wide array of issues affecting urban youth, placing them largely in the violence general prevention category.

Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) is a program that helps victims and perpetrators come to a resolution after harm has taken place. They focus on building relationships, resolving problems, and repairing harm. They offer trainings that involve a circle process and the integration of restorative practices into individuals' lives. The restorative practices are used as preventative methods to reduce or prevent any type of violence from occurring. They collaborate with schools in the RCSD with which they have a contract. PiRI uses restorative practices to help students and teachers form relationships that ultimately provide skills and an atmosphere for conflict resolution. They have also worked with the M.K. Gandhi Institute, Center for Dispute Settlement, and Pathways to Peace on workshops and with youth to manage disagreements in nonviolent ways. While PiRI provides services after violence has occurred to assist parties involved in repairing the harm, their services are largely focused on nonviolent offenses and in schools to promote a culture of nonviolence and improve conflict resolution in general.

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is facilitated by volunteers throughout New York State and addresses any form of violence. They primarily focus on helping individuals develop a variety of skills such as communication/listening, cooperation, and conflict transformation through role play. AVP holds violence prevention workshops that last between 18-22 hours total in schools and prisons. There are three levels of workshops including basic, advanced, and training for facilitators. The workshops are participatory-based and usually consist of a circle of about 20-25 participants and a facilitation team of 2-5 facilitators. The skills developed in these workshops can be used to help address violence and create alternatives. Although Alternatives to Violence Project does not currently collaborate with other programs in Rochester, they are open to working with those that are focused on educating individuals on more appropriate ways of dealing with violence. There are some outcome evaluations of AVP listed on their website, the most recent one being from Minnesota, which measured the level of anger that people incarcerated held before a workshop and after. The study found that even two years after taking the AVP workshop, level of anger was reduced in participants.

Targeted Prevention

We classified the following programs as target prevention because they target specific groups within the community who show signs of being at-risk for engagement in violence. The Rochester Youth Diversion Program (RYDP) helps mediate conflicts between school-age youth by using restorative practices as an alternative to suspension. The mediation sessions are facilitated by the RYDP in which the two parties are placed in a room together to discuss their conflict and a solution. Advocates of the youth and others involved in the conflict (such as school administrators, parents, School Resource Officers, or other students) also participate in the conferences. The group decides on student offender contracts that allow them to take responsibility for their actions and to repair the harm inflicted on another student. Parents of the students are also incorporated into this process during a preconference in which they are informed about the program, and rules are agreed upon. The program primarily works with youth from the Rochester City School District. The program sends a letter informing administrators about the program and extending an invitation for the schools to utilize their services. RYDP aims to address youth conflict early enough to have a mediation session before it becomes an even bigger issue, which is how they work on addressing and deterring violence.

Rochester Police Department's Victim Assistance Program works to help victims and their families on a short-term basis who have experienced any crime or violence. Their services consist of transportation, referrals to other agencies, home visits, explanations of the criminal justice system, and monetary support. They also aim to make sure that victims are aware of their rights and that they receive the proper services. RPD's Victim Assistance Program addresses violence in hopes of reducing it by helping victims create safety plans, obtain orders of protections, informing them about their rights, and letting them know when their attacker is released from jail. They also strongly discourage retaliation. They collaborate with RPD's Clergy Response Department, which will go to the violence scene and try to calm the situation. In addition, they also have meetings and sub-committees and work with several other legal and community organizations.

The Center for Dispute Settlement is a program that primarily deals with mediating conflict between parties. They work in several New York counties including Monroe. They assist with parent/child, divorce, family, tenant and landlord, police and community, neighbor-to-neighbor, and custody/visitation mediations. In addition, they do early intervention mediation

with children in pre-school or kindergarten and special education mediations within schools that contact them for help. Their mediation sessions include the conflicting parties sitting together and voicing their issue in hopes of reaching a resolution. There are also group facilitations held to help find solutions to ongoing issues among larger parties. Center for Dispute Settlement addresses violence by intervening in conflicts early on to lessen the probability of the situation escalating or turning violent. They collaborate with the legal systems, schools, and community groups to receive referrals and to conduct mediation sessions and trainings.

Alternatives for Independent Youth (AIY) – Street Outreach and Drop-In Center is a program offered by Hillside. This program works with youth between the ages of 13 and 22 that are on the street, runaways, and homeless. AIY works with youth to help get them off of the street and provide a safe shelter. This street outreach program has three components. The first is traditional street outreach in which the outreach team engages youth directly on the streets in Rochester. The jail or correctional facility outreach component involves visiting youth in jail and providing them with support, especially as they are about to be released from incarceration. The last component is the Drop-In Center. This center is available to youth three evenings a week. They provide meals, laundry, recreational services, and other support services. Because they target teenagers who are engaged in a risky and potentially dangerous lifestyle, we consider them a targeted violence prevention program.

The Center for Youth also operates a Street Outreach that provides homeless and runaway youth between the ages of 13-22 with survival and crisis care. They identify youth that are at high-risk by conducting outreach on the streets and receiving referrals from other agencies. The workers of this program are on the streets of Rochester five times a week and target areas that are highly concentrated with violence and youth. They give out food, clothes, Christmas gifts, condoms, and shelter to anyone as young as 13 without needing parental approval. Street Outreach also offers case management and makes referrals for other services. They also monitor the Safe Place program, which is a network of places in the community where youth can go to if they are lost, in danger, or are feeling unsafe. This program addresses violence by extending resources and helping young adults that are likely to be on the streets or committing crimes

Villa Tracking Curfew Checking (VTCC) is a community-based service offered by Villa of Hope. VTCC has to be requested by a judge from Monroe County Family Court in order to facilitate the family court cases of young adults between the ages of 10-17. The program staff

conduct daily check-ups with court-involved youth to be sure they are consistently going to school, safely home when they are supposed to be, and attending their court appointments. This program serves as an alternative to detention, which allows students to be home rather than in a detention facility. VTCC works with 20 students at a time and with 110-140 juveniles throughout a year. We consider this a targeted violence prevention program because it targets youth already involved in the justice system who may have increased odds for involvement in violence.

Day Placement Initiative (DPI) is another service under Villa of Hope that is offered to youth between the ages of 14 and 16. DPI helps young adults with adapting to life after being in a detention center. They offer case management coaches to teens and their families. They make sure the family follows through with referrals and help with solving problems that may arise. They service 24 youth at one time and about 34 teens a year. Since the youth they work with have already served time in a detention facility and thus may be at higher risk for involvement in violence, we consider this a targeted prevention program.

The New Beginning program is an alternative school under the Center for Youth for young men between the ages of 16-21 that are experiencing obstacles in their traditional school setting or that have trouble with attendance, the law, have children, are homeless or struggle with the size of their school. This form of schooling is different from most because it is all-male, has less students, only serves grades 9-12, and has a strong social/emotional support system. The young men can refer themselves to the program or be referred by their home school, parents, probation, and any other community organizations. They have 60 young men that attend from 8:45 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day and are taught by RCSD-certified teachers. They address violence by building trustful relationships with the young men that attend this school so that they feel safe and comfortable to talk about issues they may be facing such as gang violence. Because many of the young adults they serve may have displayed behavior related to violence or been involved in actual violence in the past, we consider this a targeted violence prevention program.

The Center for Youth's Teen Court is an alternative court system that focuses on educating youth about the justice system and holding them accountable for their actions with a more lenient sentence. They provide restorative justice alternatives to first-time, misdemeanor offenders between the ages of 16 and 18. The offenders are tried and sentenced by their peers. The sentences can consist of community service, writing a letter of apology, conflict resolution sessions, anger management workshops, or restitution. If they do not complete their sentence,

they have to appear again in front of their real judge. Teen Court addresses violence by helping young offenders in hopes of preventing them from committing future crimes. They generally hope that with support, opportunities, and options, the young individual will change behavior to avoid continuation in the legal system and continuation or escalation into violent activity. This program works with the RCSD, the court system, judges, Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and probation to help reinforce the sentence the young offender received and to further make sure they stay out of trouble.

Youth Court is a similar program offered by the Hillside Family of Agencies. This serves as an alternative for youth to the traditional legal system. The court still holds them highly accountable for their actions while also educating them on the effect of their actions on themselves and others. The youth participants must be first-time, non-violent misdemeanor offenders and range from 7 to 16 years old. Sentences are determined by youth volunteers that can assume different important court room roles such as a jury member. Offenders can be sentenced to community service, youth court jury duty, a curfew, written and verbal apologies, essays, restitution, educational classes, and counseling. It is the youth coordinator's job to make sure that sentences are successfully completed, and if they are, the offender is discharge with no record. However, if the offender does not abide by the condition of his or her sentence, then they may be referred to Monroe County Family Court.

The Juvenile Reporting Center (JRC) is an afterschool program for youth between the ages of 14 and 17 that are on probation or who have PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) status. The young adults are usually referred to JRC by probation, so they are required to attend. The program runs five days a week from 3:30-8 p.m. The students are picked up from their homes and transported to the center by program staff. There, they engage in activities such as group circles and skill-set training, trainings for job readiness, peer relationship development, anger management classes, sexual health and hygiene classes, and safety planning. They also go on recreational outings. JRC works closely with schools to make sure the JRC participants are attending school, with probation to be sure youth are meeting their probation obligations, with mental health agencies for referrals, and with Highland Family Planning for presentations on sexual health. This program reduces the likelihood of violence by keeping at-risk youth off of the streets and providing a safe, structured program for them. By occupying young probationers'

time with positive activities and promoting pro-social activity, they become less likely to engage in violent activities.

Crisis Intervention

We classified the following programs as crisis intervention because their services are offered as a result of a specific crisis. The Rochester Youth Violence Partnership (RYVP) is a program that stemmed from the University of Rochester Medical Center's Strong Memorial Hospital in order to help young adults under the age of 25 who are victims of shootings or stabbings to prevent re-victimization and retaliation. If a victim is under the age of 18, they have to have consent from their parents for the hospital to connect them to support services. Adult victims must consent themselves to participate in the services. This program aims to educate the youth they treat for gunshot and stab wounds about violence through a series of videos and communication. This program addresses violence by discouraging retaliation, connecting them to services, and helping young adults understand the possible negative consequences of their actions. RYVP works with 30 partner agencies including Pathways to Peace (which provides on-call hospital response services), Action for a Better Community's Save Our Youth program, the RCSD, Monroe County Probation, Coordinated Care Services Inc., the Center for Public Safety Initiatives, mental health agencies, religious organizations, Camp Good Days and Special Times, the RPD, several social service agencies, and others. The partner agency representatives meet monthly to discuss cases and care processes.

Action for a Better Community's Save Our Youth program (ABC SOY) is an gun violence intervention program that works on reducing violence in the Northeast quadrant of the city, which experiences the highest numbers of shootings. They follow the evidence-based Chicago Cure Violence model, which includes three components: 1) detect and interrupt potentially violent conflicts, 2) identify and treat the highest risk individuals, and 3) mobilize the community to change cultural norms around the use of gun violence. The quadrant is broken down into three zones with four different areas that are canvassed weekly by the outreach workers and violence interrupters. The outreach workers are credible messengers that used to be involved in gangs or violent activity and have desisted from that life and now try to connect with youth in crisis. Young adults primarily between the ages of 16 and 25 can be identified through street outreach or be referred to this program by probation, churches, community, parents, and their

self. However, they have to meet four out of the seven qualifications such as being involved in gangs, hanging around gangs, participating in high-risk behaviors in the street, and using substances that might put them at high risk. SOY addresses gun violence by doing outreach in areas where violence is more common to help young adults find alternatives to violence and to connect them with the resources they need. They work to try and interrupt violent situations during their outreach, conduct mediations, and hold community responses to every shooting in the area.

Finally, Pathways to Peace is a City of Rochester program that aims to prevent and intervene in serious kinds of violence. They conduct street outreach to build relationships with youth and adults who are on the streets, with their families, and with business owners. Anyone can provide a referral to Pathways to Peace, at which point staff would help assess the situation, mediate or create plans to prevent any violence, and connect the referred individual to longer-term supportive services. Through their relationships with the community, they often are aware of conflicts that may escalate and try to intervene before they do. They also provide the on-call response to shooting and stabbing victims at Strong Memorial and Rochester General Hospitals.

Discussion

All of the program representatives interviewed felt that there are additional underlying factors that contribute to the rise and continuation of violence in the community. Many of them stated that poverty, lack of activities, and the lack of employment for young adults are reasons why there is consistent conflict amongst youth. Additional factors that were listed include poor education, inadequate shelter, lack of unity amongst the community, and substance abuse. Those interviewed generally felt that these issues can eventually lead to violence.

Most of the programs researched and interviewed seem to be focused more on preventative measures and educating individuals on alternative ways to deal with violence. Only a few are fixated on intervening in street or gang violence. Therefore, most community programs would fit on the general prevention spectrum, as appropriate. There are a large number of targeted prevention programs within the community, which form the majority of the programs we reviewed here. The gap and lack of services seems to fall on the other end of the spectrum, which is crisis intervention.