



Making the Link

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Philanthropic Engagement with Community Youth Violence Prevention Initiatives

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At 5:00 PM the sun was still shining and so the Santiago children were happily playing in their backyard as their mother watched from the kitchen window while preparing dinner. Tomas, Alicia, Freddy, Julia and Javier were too small to play in with the big kids – teens – shooting hoops in the schoolyard next door. The soft sounds of their swing set and small feet jumbled together with the hard slaps of the basketball and sneakers and laughter spilled over the fence before everything stopped as the unmistakable sound of gunshots rang out, silencing everything else. More teens, rivals of those on the schoolyard, had driven buy, shooting. Mrs. Santiago ran from the kitchen, potholder still in hand, to shield and protect her babies. A quick count – Tomas – ok. Alicia – ok. Freddy – crouched under a swing, but ok. Julia – ok. Javi – Javi – Javi “Noooooooooooooooooooo” – Soon the desperate sobs of a mother’s grief were the only sounds left on the block. Little Javier, innocently playing with his brothers and sisters in his own backyard, had been struck by a stray bullet and lay dead just three feet from the door to his home. He had celebrated his sixth birthday just a few weeks earlier. No one ever imagined it would be his last.¹

Fourteen young people are murdered every day in the United States.² Big cities, small towns, suburbs and rural communities – all are impacted, in every region of the country. Many times, communities work alone and in isolation, cut off from common understandings and potential solutions. Yet violence against children and violence committed by youthful or gang offenders impact schools, hospitals, faith communities, neighborhoods, and businesses. No one can escape this

epidemic. Collectively, we must do more than weep with the Mrs. Santiago’s of our communities. We must join together to stop such senseless killings and to help build communities that don’t produce such violence.

Around the country, many communities are employing a new approach to confronting this challenge. Pulling together leaders across disciplines, shaped by local champions of change, communities are engaging in innovative and data-driven multi-disciplinary efforts that engage all key community entities in order to stem the tide of youth violence and restore hope and opportunity so that every child in their midst can be safe in backyards and schoolyards, sidewalks and hallways on every street and neighborhood. Some of these comprehensive community-wide efforts have been seeded by federal initiatives including the Promise and Choice Neighborhood initiatives, Safe Streets, Strong Communities, Defending Childhood and the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention. This paper will highlight the work of the National Forum and opportunities for philanthropic engagement with this work.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL FORUM ON YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION?

At the direction of the White House in 2010, the Departments of Justice and Education established the National Forum to tackle the complex social issue of youth violence. Other federal agencies including the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Labor, and Health and Human Services (HHS) were enlisted as partners and inaugural cities – Boston, Detroit, Chicago, Memphis, Salinas and San Jose – were selected to launch the initiative.³

Envisioned as “a vibrant national network of federal and local stakeholders who, through the use of multi-disciplinary

partnerships, balanced approaches and data-driven strategies, strengthen communities so that they may better prevent violence and promote the safety, health, and development of the nation's youth," the Forum established the following goals:

- Elevate youth and gang violence as an issue of national significance.
- Enhance the capacity of participating localities, as well as others across the country, to more effectively prevent youth and gang violence.
- Sustain progress and systems change through engagement, alignment, and assessment.

Four key themes were established to drive the work, with each community approach utilizing:

- Multidisciplinary Partnerships (government and non-government agencies together with the faith-based, business and philanthropic communities);
- Balanced Approaches (encompassing prevention, intervention, law enforcement strategies and re-entry);
- Data-Driven Strategies; and
- Comprehensive Planning to guide the work.

Once these goals and themes were established and the cities were selected, each city was given six months to assemble their multi-disciplinary planning team and develop their comprehensive plan. These plans were presented to the White House, federal agencies and to one another at the first National Forum Summit in April 2011. Through federally sponsored technical assistance and supported peer-to-peer learning opportunities, the cities have been pushed not only to implement their plans, but to improve upon them by sharing and learning from one another in this unique collaborative network. Jeffrey Butts, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation Center at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Caterina Roman, Ph.D., Assistant Professor with the Department of Criminal Justice at Temple University, have been enlisted to collect data and provide an ongoing assessment of Forum activities and efforts. Some of the promising initiatives in the cities include the following:

- Boston – has activated a network of Boston Centers for Youth and Families together with intensive streetworker outreach, summer learning and family information to focus on preventing and reducing violence in targeted areas of the community.
- Memphis – has created an afterschool organization for gang-involved youth, dubbed "GRASSY," located in Memphis Schools. In one year they have experienced a 138% decrease in gang violence among the target population.

- Salinas – has launched an initiative with the local police force called "CASP COPS." Officers take a non-enforcement approach to working with the community and are trained in mediation and conflict resolution. Once completed, they are placed in the targeted neighborhood with the highest incidence of youth violence activity.
- San Jose – had been doing community-wide violence prevention work for years but had not yet focused on offender re-entry. Through creating the Re-entry Network, the city has reduced recidivism among youthful offenders from 79% to 58% in one year.
- Chicago – is working to establish a cross-system approach that includes business partnerships and City-County leadership.
- Detroit – the Youth Leadership Council brings youth to the table in meaningful ways, including the Safe Corridors to School initiative, which was re-structured largely as a result of youth engagement in the process.

In a parallel effort to demonstrate the value of employing a multi-system approach, the Federal National Forum Coordination team, which includes representatives from all the participating federal agencies, developed its own action plan and is working to improve coordination and blending of resources at the federal level to support the work in the localities.

Recognizing that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to the challenges related to children's exposure to violence and youth violence in our communities, the National Forum offers a significant opportunity to address a critical national need with creative intentionality and pooled expertise across multiple sectors and domains.

THE NEED

Extensive research in the field of child development and the impact of trauma demonstrates that children's exposure to violence, whether as victims or witnesses, is often associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm. Children exposed to violence are also at a higher risk of engaging in criminal behavior later in life and becoming part of a cycle of violence. A 2009 U.S. Department of Justice study of children ages 17 and younger showed that more than 60 percent were exposed to violence within the past year either directly or indirectly.⁴

Additional findings from this study include:

- Children exposed to violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior.



- Children are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime than adults.
- Almost one in ten American children saw one family member assault another family member, and more than 25 percent had been exposed to family violence during their life.
- A child's exposure to one type of violence increases the likelihood that the child will be exposed to other types of violence and exposed multiple times.

In addition, we know that:

- More than 656,000 young people were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence in 2008, and these injuries often have life-long physical and emotional consequences.⁵
- Issues related to safety, bullying and violence adversely impact children's opportunities for success at school. Approximately 5% of high school students report that they did not go to school because they felt unsafe, 8% say they have been threatened or injured by a weapon on school property, 11% report they have been in a physical fight at school, and approximately 20% report they have been bullied at school.⁶
- Juveniles accounted for 16% of all violent crime arrests and 26% of all property crime arrests.⁷ The cost of arresting, prosecuting, incarcerating, and treating these youthful offenders is the fastest growing part of most state budgets and now runs into the billions of dollars per year.^{8,9} The cost of youth violence homicides and injury related assaults exceed \$14 billion in medical and loss of work costs.¹⁰

In spite of these and other compelling facts related to the human and economic cost of violence related to children and youth in our nation, this has not been an area of significant focus or investment by the philanthropic community. The *Youth Transition Funders Group (YTTFG)* notes that:

Grantmakers are often uninterested in, or unaware of the needs of, older youth. Funding from private philanthropists and from state and federal programs is either flat or decreasing. Efforts to encourage deep-pocket investments in the issues of older youth receive a mixed response, because traditional public policy regarding older youth has often resulted in programs that fracture, rather than mend, young people's connections to communities.¹¹

The remainder of this paper will explore promising opportunities for philanthropic organizations to engage in and partner with the work of the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention and other similar collaborative, community-driven approaches to addressing this critical issue.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHILANTHROPIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

There is a valuable "three-way" bridging phenomenon that occurs when government, community organizations and philanthropists strategically unite to achieve critical objectives. Successful partnerships add value and create benefits for each of the partnering organization, as well as for the community as a whole. Impact and change can occur at the community level when a combination of factors is present, including when:

- Dollars are strategically invested
- Existing relationships are harnessed and leveraged, while new relationships are established and nurtured
- Best practices are identified and implemented while innovation continues to be supported
- Clear, cogent, consistent advocacy and commitment by city leaders

There are at least six meaningful roles philanthropic organizations can play as they join forces with the National Forum, both at the federal and community level, to impact change by utilizing the above factors strategically. These roles are:

- Thought Partner
- Convener
- Champion
- Connector
- Mentor
- Sustainer

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AS THOUGHT PARTNERS

Philanthropic organizations have the capacity to draw upon creative thinking and expertise across multiple domains and are not limited by the same constraints that their government or non-profit colleagues face. When philanthropy comes to the table with as a thought partner, they have the opportunity to both encourage and seed innovation as well as to support effective approaches to research, program evaluation and implementation of promising and best practices.

Philanthropists working at both the national and/or community level can help identify gaps in evidence-based programs for vulnerable populations and consider potential next steps to support the use of evidence in supports and interventions for youth impacted by or at risk of engaging in community violence. Philanthropy can assist collaborative initiatives as they seek to move ideas from the innovation-incubator stage through strong

program design, evaluation, and attainment of evidence of positive outcomes.

When engaged at the federal level as a thought-partner, philanthropic organizations can leverage existing expertise by adding meaningful capacity. An example of this is Casey Family Programs, a national operating foundation based in Seattle, who uses the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) to sponsor senior fellows embedded in federal agencies including the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Education and Housing and Urban Development. Such fellows not only add capacity and expertise to the agency's in which they serve, but can function as a critical bridge between the public and private sector as policies, strategies, funding decisions and programs are developed and implemented both within and outside of government. In its first year of implementation, Casey's IPA fellow at the Department of Justice has worked closely with the National Forum and contributed to the development of the Forum's strategic plan as well as supported work in the six cities related to deepening opportunities for engaging multi-disciplinary partners (particularly in the business and philanthropic communities) and to more intentionally engaging youth and families in the work.

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AS NEUTRAL CONVENERS

Philanthropic organizations, as noted by YTTFG, "often have the resources to convene stakeholders across political affiliations, organizational roles, and geographic locations to make sure decision makers have the best information and access to key individuals to stay updated on what works."¹²

Typically perceived as neutral, philanthropic organizations are not beholden to any particular ideology, political party, or administration. This role as a neutral convener can be instrumental in bringing together a diverse and broad alliance of agencies, funders and community partners which in turn can lead to increased understanding of the scope of the need and the multi-level opportunities for solutions at the community level. When diverse partners convene, they are able to develop concrete, actionable opportunities for each partner to "own" a piece of the city's comprehensive plan for preventing and addressing youth violence. Some of these actions may be immediate, one-shot or short-term activities, while others might be longer-term and deeper partnering or investments. An effective convener is essential to this process.

Within the National Forum, an example of a foundation effectively exercising this convener role is the Skillman Foundation, a private grantmaking foundation. By using its role as a neutral convener, the Skillman Foundation has aided Detroit's National Forum site as they assembled a strong multi-

disciplinary steering body with representation from public and private – including faith-based and youth-led – sector partners. Skillman came to the table in the very beginning of Detroit's involvement with the National Forum and continues to be a strong partner as the work has moved from planning to implementation. Key Skillman leaders have attended not only local steering committee meetings in Detroit, but have also traveled to Washington, DC to support the Detroit site during National Forum working sessions and Summits. This level of personalized leadership not only supports the work of the National Forum site in Detroit, but deepens Skillman's knowledge base around these important issues and therefore informs their work across their foundation's initiatives.

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION AS CHAMPIONS OF THE WORK

Newspaper, television, radio and internet headlines about youth violence and its impact on a community make the issue inescapable to most citizens. However, although there is broad awareness of the problem, there is less awareness that meaningful and effective solutions exist and can be implemented in cost effective ways. This dichotomy often leads to public outcries for stronger law-enforcement efforts and harsher punishments for youthful offenders and others caught up in the web of youth violence. In order for the work of collaboration efforts such as the National Forum to take root and begin to demonstrate success, strong local champions are needed. Such champions can help re-frame and shape the public discourse about the youth violence issue and support effective communication and public awareness activities. This is another valuable and significant opportunity for philanthropic organizations.

An example within the National Forum network is the Boston Foundation, who devotes its resources to building and sustaining a vital, prosperous city and region, where justice and opportunity are extended to everyone. As collaborative partners with the Boston National Forum site, the Foundation has championed the cause and brought enhanced public awareness to the issue in multiple ways. This support has helped the Boston site to leverage existing relationships as they developed the Mayor's Executive Governance Board for Youth Violence Prevention. This board brings together under one umbrella the steering committees and leadership of multiple initiatives in the city which focus on issues related to youth violence. Another example of Boston Foundation's role as champion is in their *Street Safe Boston* campaign and its use of *Boston by Night Tours* as a way of bringing critical public awareness to the challenges and opportunities Boston faces when addressing youth violence issues.



PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AS CONNECTORS

Foundations, whether community, national or corporate, are almost always connected to a wider consortium of foundations, and thus are the beneficiaries of information from across the nation. For example, Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families (GCYF) meets regularly to discuss promising practices, changes in the field, hopeful local innovations and policy implications. The Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) and the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) are two more examples of philanthropic consortia which have included issues related to youth and community violence among their signature issues. Thus when a foundation in one city seriously considers funding a local youth violence prevention program, it can easily check with colleagues for guidance. These "consortia" often have ready access and are prepared to share the most current data.

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AS MENTORS

Business and philanthropic organizations can play an extremely valuable role at both the national and community level by supporting leadership and infrastructure development and offering mentoring opportunities for both the adults and the youth involved in these collaboratives. Philanthropic and business community executives and experts can offer the cities involved with the National Forum (and related community collaborative) strategic consultation and technical assistance in the further development, strengthening, and/or steps towards implementation of their comprehensive plans addressing youth violence in their communities. This can take the form of supporting steering committee (or board) development, providing "executives-on-loan," or assisting in the development of sustainable and effective infrastructures to support the work. In addition, philanthropic and business organizations can provide direct support for youth in the target communities by creating specific programs offering job shadowing, internships, mentoring, or youth employment opportunities.

An example of this level of support for the National Forum work is demonstrated by the partnership with the Target Corporation. Target has made a commitment to support the leaders in each of the National Forum cities by providing consultation and technical assistance as well as by seeding the cities specific work around youth engagement.

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AS SUSTAINERS OF THE WORK

No review of potential strategies and opportunities for philanthropic engagement with the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention and related community-driven collaborative would be complete without noting the critical role of philanthropy in funding and supporting the spread and sustainability of such initiatives. While philanthropic organizations can bring much more to the table than money, as illustrated by the examples highlighted throughout this paper, in these difficult economic times when government funds are being pared to the bone, the role of philanthropy in making strategic, intentional, thoughtful financial investments in effective approaches to reducing and mitigating the impact of youth violence cannot be over-stated. Each of the organization highlighted in this paper – Casey Family Programs, the Skillman Foundation, the Boston Foundation and Target – have not only supported the work through their roles as thought partners, conveners, champions and mentors, they have also invested financially in the work.

Investments can be large or small – it is not the amount that matters as much as the act of making the investment. When one organization makes such an investment, this often acts as a catalyst for other philanthropic, corporate, individual and public funders to match and add to the pool of resources available for the work. When considering investing in National Forum cities, or related efforts in other communities, philanthropic organization can consider a range of potential opportunities including:

- Support for the leadership and infrastructure of the initiative by funding staff positions, data management systems or other infrastructure needs as well as providing advice, contacts for board members, and related supports;
- Support for the development and implementation of evidence-based programs and practices by funding data collection, research and evaluation activities;
- Support for continuing attention to the issues related to youth violence by funding messaging, communication and public awareness tools and campaigns; and
- Support for effective interventions by funding and bringing other philanthropic organizations together to fund specific initiatives or programs in the communities which are identified by and supported by the city's comprehensive plan.

These are just a few examples of investment opportunities philanthropic organizations can consider when working with community-led collaborative youth-violence prevention initiatives such as the National Forum.

IN CONCLUSION

Philanthropic organizations have the power, influence and capacity to make a meaningful difference in one of the most significant challenges of our time – the issue of youth violence and its impact on our communities and the future of our nation. By strategically considering how to maximize their role as thought partners, conveners, champions, mentors and sustainers of this work, philanthropic organizations can be leaders in the effort to make sure that the rest of Mrs. Santiago’s children can enjoy the freedom of playing safely in their own yard, and celebrating many more birthdays.

References

- ¹ This is a true story from one of the National Forum cities. Names have been changed.
- ² “Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS),” National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed February 1, 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/injury>.
- ³ Cities were selected based upon their readiness to engage in the comprehensive planning and implementation process, strong commitment from city leadership and a desire to achieve geographic diversity across the nation.
- ⁴ D. Finkelhor, H. Turner, R. Ormrod, S. Hamby, and K. Kracke, “Children’s Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey,” *Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, quoted from the US DOJ Defending Childhood Fact Sheet at <http://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/facts.html>.
Conducted between January and May 2008, researchers interviewed a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children and adolescents age 17 and younger in 2 groups: a nationally representative sample of telephone numbers within the contiguous United States (n = 3,053) and an oversample of telephone exchanges with 70 percent or greater African American, Hispanic, or low-income households to ensure a proportion of minority and low-income households large enough for subgroup analysis. The survey measured the past-year and lifetime exposure to violence for children age 17 and younger across several major categories: conventional crime, child maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, witnessing and indirect victimization (including exposure to community violence and family violence), school violence and threats, and Internet victimization.
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011).
- ⁶ “Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance – United States, 2009,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010): Vol. 59, No. SS-5.
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- ¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011).
- ¹¹ “Big Wins, Small Foundations: A Guide to Making Smart Choices about Grant-making for Vulnerable Youth,” *Youth Transition Funders Group* (2012). In press.
- ¹² YTFG (2012). In press.