

# Street outreach workers an important tool for violence prevention and intervention

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A new study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy describes how using street outreach workers is an effective strategy to reach and engage youth with the goal of violence prevention and intervention.

Street outreach workers are typically members of the community who intervene to prevent conflict and retaliation, and in some programs, also connect individuals with needed services, such as housing and job training. While cities across the United States are utilizing street outreach workers as part of their violence prevention programs, including CeaseFire in Chicago and Safe Streets in Baltimore, this is the first peer-reviewed study on a program to be published. This is also the first evaluation of this type of program in a smaller community; the researchers studied the street outreach workers program run by the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) in Lowell, Mass., a city of 105,167 residents north of Boston.

The results are published in the Fall 2010 issue of *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*.

Analysis of the data collected from interviews with the UTEC managers, the UTEC street workers, and representatives from local community groups yielded five major factors that contribute to the UTEC street outreach workers program's success: involvement of youth in hiring street outreach workers; investment in quality training for the street outreach workers; providing street outreach workers with a

comprehensive benefits package and team retreats to prevent staff turnover and burnout; establishment of community partnerships; and incorporation of peacemaking into outreach.

"These features should be considered both by communities with existing street outreach worker programs and by communities in the process of establishing one, as they have demonstrated importance for both program success and sustainability," said Shannon Frattaroli, PhD, MPH, assistant professor with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Department of Health Policy and Management and the paper's lead author.

The process of peacemaking, which typically involves engaging gang leaders in conflict mediation, convening peace circles, participating in a peace summit, and organizing a peace council, is a unique feature of the Lowell program. The UTEC team has invested in peacemaking because they believe it has helped to reduce conflict among gangs that have participated in the process. Another integral aspect of the UTEC program is an emphasis on providing resources for creating viable alternatives to violence, such as education advancement, skills development, and securing employment.

"As communities around the country continue to struggle with how to address youth violence, it's important to recognize that young people need resources in addition to strategies that help them to negotiate conflict," said Keshia Pollack, PhD, MPH, also an assistant professor with the Bloomberg School's Department of Health Policy and Management and co-author of the paper. "Coupling support with essential services is a key to helping youth make healthy and safe transitions to adulthood."

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public

## Health

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