

**A Public Health Approach To Mitigating
Interpersonal Violence And Institutional
Structural Impediments For The City Of
Pittsburgh And Allegheny County**



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You can tell the soul of a nation by how it treats its children.”

--Nelson Mandela

Profile of Community Empowerment Association

Community Empowerment Association (CEA) was founded in 1994 by veteran community activist T. Rashad Byrdsong in an effort to reduce and prevent violence in the Homewood-Brushton area of Pittsburgh. Major mission of CEA is the restoration, reclamation and transformation of distressed communities through strategic planning, collaboration, advocacy, education and mobilization. CEA accomplishes its mission by providing high quality, well-managed, innovative services and programs that empower the African-American community, i.e. a culturally specific truancy prevention & intervention program, afterschool diversion program, behavioral health initiative, outreach program to older male teens seriously at risk for gang involvement, resident leadership forums, community summits and conferences, family support services, educational forums, housing, economic development, and employment. Since its inception, CEA has served over 14,000 individuals, youth and families residing in 48 neighborhoods, enrolled in 92 schools and 23 school districts within Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

CEA initiative is focused on strengthening the social functioning and resiliency of youth and family members who are currently underserved or hesitant to use traditional social and human services. Unique leadership provided by CEA is well reflected in the programs that it offers, extremely well attended events that it sponsors, as well as the two recent **Emergency Town Hall Meetings On Stopping Violence** in which over 350 community residents and other major stakeholders attended (including city and county law enforcement officials, public officials, university representatives, leaders of community-based and faith-based organizations, criminal justice researchers, and others). Recognized as an exceptional organization, CEA is the recipient of grants and recognition awards issued by distinguished local foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, an Esprit Award of the Mental Health Association of Allegheny County, Community Advocacy Award, YouthWorks Program of Distinction, African American Community Service and Leadership Award, the first Gwen Elliot (Gwens' Girls) Lifetime Achievement Award, and a number of others.

T. Rashad Byrdsong is nationally known for his innovation in building coalitions (Parents in Action, Citizen Coalition for Justice, African American Workforce Development, Grassroots 200, East End Workforce Development Task Force, Homewood-Brushton Community Coalition Organization, Measles Immunization Task Force, Center for Injury Research & Control-Presbyterian Hospital Trauma Unit) to name a few. An advocate for social justice, he is devoted to generating tangible benefits for African American communities where a vast number of the underserved population suffers from violence and crime victimization, poverty, poor health, and other systemic racial disparities and discrimination. His effective leadership stems from his experiences in the civil rights struggle, combat service in Vietnam, and membership in the Black Panther Party. He has a long history of working with youth who are seriously at risk for imprisonment or death – providing street mentoring services, conflict resolution, negotiating peace treaties, family reunification and connecting these youth to appropriate services to put them on a more positive life track. He was Principal Investigator, collaborating with a major hospital system in Pittsburgh, to provide trauma intervention services in the emergency room with the families of victims who experienced violent traumatic events.

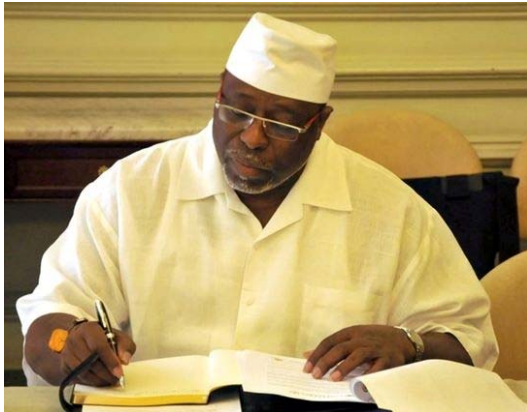
Currently, Mr. Byrdsong is part of the National Urban Peace and Justice Council, an organization that has been holding youth/gang summits throughout the United States for over 15 years, bringing members of gangs and other street organizations together in efforts to negotiate peace treaties, as well as offer mediation and conflict resolution services. He is also a member of a national mediation conflict resolution initiative that has traveled extensively throughout the country addressing gang violence. His success as a powerful negotiator among rival street organizations is due to his reputation as a man who genuinely works to broker support and understanding of conditions they face while challenging them to find more positive ways to interact. Mr. Byrdsong, a deeply spiritual man, has successfully expanded an initial advocacy group staffed with concerned volunteers working with families who had lost children to violence, to an institution which has generated over \$15 million to provide services to underserved populations.

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Message from T. Rashad Byrdsong



Violence is a serious public health problem in the United States. It affects people in all stages of life, from infants to the elderly. Based on available official data, again, 2011 will be an inexcusably high and violence infested year. In the City of Pittsburgh, over 8,000 violent crimes (homicide, rape, aggravated and simple assaults, and robbery) annually, will victimize city residents.

Violence erodes communities in many ways, by reducing public safety, economic productivity, and devaluing properties. It also disrupts the education of youth, lowers neighborhood attachment and strains family relationships. Those who have survived violence are also left with permanent and deteriorating physical and emotional scars.

In order to break the cycle of violence, service providers, academic, and public officials must share information, knowledge and resources to develop an interdisciplinary and scientifically sound strategic plan. Based on my assessment, one viable

solution is to collaboratively address violence, based on a public health paradigm using an intervention system focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and development. This strategy can engage community residents in positive ways, and empower them to take ownership and sustain much needed resident commitment for long-term public safety.

Unfortunately, overreliance on law enforcement in controlling violence, invites further affliction on our youth and adults in The Greater Pittsburgh region. This suppressive intervention alone is doom to a failure and will lead to endless homicides of our brothers and sisters.

Over 30 years of criminal justice research has shown that, forces of police vigilance and tougher sentencing will not control crime, nor sustain public safety. Waves of brutal crimes are symptomatic of a contagious ailment in our communities, not inherent or deliberate viciousness.

The Community Empowerment Association has been working with resource poor neighborhoods throughout Allegheny County, delivering a message of hope and empowerment for African American men and women. This message encourages The African American Community to take its place in solving community problems. It is obvious from recent public hearings and post sessions held over the last 24 months, facilitated by Councilman Rev. Ricky Burgess, as well CEA Emergency Town Hall Meetings, with 800+ attendees, this approach is not only salient but appropriate.

Violence Reduction

A Core belief of CEA is that children and families develop best when there is a sense of order and safety, enriched social interaction, educational achievement, and support by exemplary adult residents-- especially among neighborhoods where there is concentrated poverty. Regrettably, however, our communities are continually suffering with the grief and pain resulting from the violent deaths of family members, friends and loved ones. Now, more than ever, each one of us must recognize our roles and responsibilities in addressing this most preposterous issue of our time. Thus, this plan presents a vision of an integrative approach to violence reduction.

A. Facts on Violence

Youth violence is invading our streets, schools, and homes in epidemic proportions. Our children are dying and our communities are hemorrhaging. Below are facts on violence.

1. Nationally

- Violence is a serious national and local problem. Among 10-24 year olds in the US, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans.
- Youth interpersonal violence, by any standard or measure, is a significant national problem that has plagued the United States for decades. It is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24.
- Most recently reported, over 6,000 young people age 10 to 24 are being murdered annually in US—an average of 16 young people each day— a leading cause of death for African Americans, the second leading cause for Hispanics, and the third leading cause for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Asian/Pacific Islanders.
- Over 631,000 violence-related injuries reported, were young people age 10 to 24 were treated in U.S. emergency rooms.
- In a recent nationwide survey, 36% of high school students reported being in a physical fight during the previous 12 months.
- An estimated 30% of children between 6th and 10th grade report being involved in bullying.
- More Americans were murdered in USA in one year than American soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.
- Youth gang violence costs the citizens of this country in excess of 200 billion dollars a year. At least 80 percent of the economic costs of treating firearm injuries are paid for by taxpayer dollars.

2. Locally (City of Pittsburgh Police Statistics)

- ❖ In the City of Pittsburgh, over 8,000 violent crimes (homicide, rape, aggravated and simple assaults, and robbery) will annually impact residents.
- ❖ Total number of homicides in the first 9 months of 2010 exceeded the total number of the entire year 2009. The murder rate in 2010 increased 41 percent from 2009.

- ❖ The murder rate of 17.6 per 100,000 people in 2010 is significantly higher than any of the previous averages over the past century.
- ❖ Among murdered victims, 88.3% were African American, and a majority of them were young adults and youth as young as 12 years old.
- ❖ In Pittsburgh, the top three most frequent motives for killing included; (1) altercation or argument (2) drug related issue; and (3) retaliation. These major motives represented nearly half of the homicide cases.
- ❖ Pennsylvania's African American homicide rate is nearly seven times the national overall homicide rate (Violence Policy Center, 2008).

3. Violence and Chronic Illness. According to UNITY (funded by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):

- ❖ Growing body of science is consistently linking violence (the experience with and/or fear of) with risk for and incidence of a range of serious physical health problems.
- ❖ While it has been long understood that violence has implications for emotional and physical injury, it is only relatively recent, that we are beginning to recognize the longer-term effects that reap an extensive toll on the broader health status of individuals, families and communities.
- ❖ Adults reporting exposure to violence as children showed an increased likelihood in number of chronic health conditions compared those without such exposures:
 - heart disease 2.2 time more,
 - cancer 1.9 time more,
 - stroke 2.4 time more,
 - chronic obstructive lung disease 3.9 time more,
 - diabetes 1.6 times more, and
 - hepatitis 2.4 time more
- ❖ There is a significantly higher likelihood of engaging in behaviors known to contribute to chronic illnesses (smoking, eating disorders, substance abuse, decreased physical activity) for those who have been exposed to one or more types of interpersonal violence.

B. The Cycle of Incarceration Plaguing Communities of Color

On a national level, relying on a criminal justice response to the problem of youth violence has economic implications for the general development of children and adolescents. During times of budget deficits, increased public expenditures in one area come at a significant cost to others. The most significant governmental shift in spending has been noted in education to crime control. Corresponding with the surge of offender population, is the increasing cost of operating correctional facilities, well illustrated in Pennsylvania's correctional budget, which has increased uncontrollably -- from \$454 million in 1995 to over \$2 billion dollars in 2009.

The current after the fact retributive justice policy response to the problem of youth violence and delinquency has implications which effect health, development and well being of the young both inside and outside the corrections system. Such resource allocation compounds the public health problem of death, injury and disability. The cost of the policy responses to youth violence – and the opportunities foregone as a result – will tower if health is envisioned as being more than the absence of injury and disease, but rather as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being. The attainment of adequate education, healthcare, personal security, housing and recreational opportunity is necessary.

Additional information on the investments in Prisons and the Criminal Justice System include:

- Enormous amounts of dollars have been invested in the development of trauma centers to treat severe injuries like gunshot wounds. Comparatively little resources, investments or thought has gone into preventing the injuries. The parallel in the criminal justice system is obvious. Almost all of our investments have been put into identifying, catching, prosecuting, and incarcerating criminals. Very little has been put into stopping or reducing the activities which lead young people to criminal and violent behaviors.
- We spend billions of dollars reacting to violence and barely millions on preventing it. We train and pay millions of people to respond to crime –but few to prevent it.
- The multi-billion dollar corporate industry that has evolved to warehouse criminals is literally making out like bandits. As we have seen in the healthcare system, our money, our creativity and our human resources have been placed at the wrong end of the equation.
- Disparities in education, healthcare, housing, child welfare and economic opportunity help to thrust disproportionate numbers of people of color and the poor into the criminal justice system, through which they continuously cycle, placing band-aids on wounds which have metaphorically slowed the flow of blood, but not addressed their underlying causes.
- Policy decisions that invest in pre-entry interventions instead of building more jails, and prisons.
- Children and young adults living in communities plagued by concentrated poverty, inadequate education, healthcare systems, and limited economic opportunity.
- During the last twenty years youth interpersonal violence has traditionally been considered the exclusive domain of the criminal justice system, and responses have largely focused on control strategies, law enforcement, and the alternatives offered by judicial and penal institutions.
- Arrests, a heavy investment in incarceration, and more severe prosecution of juveniles and children have been the popular bipartisan policy responses.
- At the community level, relying on incarceration and other retributive criminal justice responses, without correcting the pattern of discriminatory enforcement, has resulted in rates of selective and concentrated imprisonment among youth.

- America's criminal justice system is marked by what has been described as, a "cycle of incarceration" – a clearly discernible pattern of disproportionate number of poor and people of color, particularly young men of color, entering into and cycling through the criminal justice system. All too often one's life opportunities after incarceration are so limited that recidivism is an inevitable outcome.
- This cycle of incarceration is deeply embedded in communities across America and is exacerbated by concentrated poverty, inadequate education, substance abuse, racial tension, unemployment, insufficient housing, and poor health outcomes.
- Profound connections exist between what's been called a cycle of incarceration and such unaddressed social conditions as education, economic opportunity, housing, poverty, race and health.
- This cycle of incarceration is fueled by criminal justice policies that emphasize incarceration over human service interventions that address, individual family, schools and environmental risk factors for delinquent or criminal behavior.
- A more integrative approach to policy making and resource allocation would help to ensure that the limited pool of available public resources are used most effectively to address the issues of poverty, race, economic opportunity, education and family.
- A unique opportunity exists, at present, to address issues that fuel Pittsburgh's and Allegheny County's cycle of incarceration issues such as, poverty, racial disparities, lack of economic opportunity, inadequate education, health disparities, family and child welfare, and inadequate housing.

A more integrative approach to policy making and resource allocation would help to ensure that the limited pool of available resources are used most effectively to address the issues of poverty, race, economic opportunity, education and family.

Criminalization at a glance:

- The United States represents only 5 percent of the world's population, but we hold 25 percent of the world's inmates in our prisons and jails (Pew Center on the States, 2008).
- The US has more people behind bars in total numbers and per capita than any other industrialized country – 2.3 million out of just over 300 million (750 per 100,000 residents), which equals one out of 100 U.S. adults. Annually, an estimated 12 million people cycle in and out of nearly 3,500 U.S. jails (Beck, 2006).
- Black males aged 35-44 have the highest percentage (22%) of ever being incarcerated in State or Federal prison compared to 3.5% of White males in the same age group. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) notes that Black males face a one in three lifetime chance of prison-time (32%), compared to a mere 6% for White males (Bonczar, 2003).
- Approximately 9% of all men are incarcerated during their lifetime, but 27% of Black men had their first prison experience by the age of 40 (Bonczar & Beck, 1997). Nationally, 41% of all male inmates are Black, even though less than 14% of the total US population is Black (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007).

- On an average day, approximately 10,900 youth 18 and under, are incarcerated and 15% of those youth are housed in adult facilities that may lack services for youth. Minority youth are over represented in the juvenile justice system, with African American and Latino youth accounting for over 60% of young offenders in juvenile facilities – an over-representation rate by more than 200%.
- Based on Allegheny County Jail’s (ACJ) historical data, jail entry distribution strongly reflects racial inequity in reference to the population profile of Allegheny County. Although African Americans comprise less than one-eighth (12.5%) of the Allegheny County population, they comprise:
 - More than half of the total number of ACJ inmates (51.2),
 - Among male ACJ inmates, 53% are Black,
 - Among female ACJ inmates, 43.8% are Black, and
 - Among those younger than 21, 66.1% are Black

A unique opportunity exists, at present, to address issues that fuel Pittsburgh’s and Allegheny County’s cycle of incarceration issues such as poverty, racial disparities, lack of economic opportunity, inadequate education, health disparities, family and child welfare, and inadequate housing.

C. Impact of Violence on the Healthcare System

- For every homicide, according to the National Crime Survey, there are more than 100 non-lethal assaults.
- More than 721,000 young people, ages 10-24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence.
- The increase in the use of firearms in acts of aggression has not only led to an increase in lethality, and hence a greater number of homicides, but has also led to a greater number of survivors who are severely and permanently injured.
- Spinal cord injury has increased steadily as a result of violence. Induced firearm injury – once considered a war time injury – by 1973 gunshot wounds were second only to motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of traumatic quadriplegia and paraplegia.
- In several urban areas spinal cord injuries have doubled or tripled the current wave of gunshot spinal injuries constitutes a new generation of injury cases (Zeeb 1991) and a new patient group has emerged; youth with violence induced spinal cord injury.
- During the last twenty years, urban trauma has been described as analogous to a chronic recurrent disease with a significant mortality rate, due to the probability of recurrent injuries. The young injured victims are generally discharged into a resource poor community beset with violence, so that a return to a violence prone lifestyle or further victimization is a significant risk ultimately resulting in another injury to themselves or others, or death.

- The fiscal burden of violence on the healthcare system in the United States has been crippling. By the 1990's, the growing number of intentional injury trauma patients and the escalating costs of services for this mostly uninsured population had become a financial obstacle for trauma center expansion and maintenance.

D. Violence is Preventable

The Centers for Disease Control now defines violence as a public health concern. Violence is preventable, not inevitable. It is a predictable behavior in the unsafe environments where people live. Rooted in a complex set of underlying issues, violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned or not learned in the first place. Forces of police vigilance and tougher sentencing will not control crime and sustain public safety, for brutal crime is a symptom of contagious sickness of communities, instead of inherent criminal or deliberate viciousness (Kenneth B. Clark, 1965).

A more integrative approach to community service intervention, policymaking and resource allocation would ensure that the limited pool of available public resources are used most effectively to address the issues associated with violence and destitute communities.

E. Paradigm Shift in Thinking About Violence is Needed

A more accurate question for reducing violence in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County is how do we effectively **prevent** violence before it occurs? It is not "how do we effectively sweep the streets and lock-up people" in order to reduce crime as suggested by the public suppression paradigm. Although law enforcement can produce a temporary reduction in rate of violence, in time, such an intervention simply invites resurgence of violence at the expense of continual imprisonment of our youth and young adults (cycle of incarceration), and neighborhood neglect and decay.

In order to effectively prevent violence before it occurs, The City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County needs an intervention system that incorporates a scientifically based comprehensive public health strategy, which views crime as a preventable social disease, inclusive of various risk and protective factors that impact the likelihood that a person will engage in criminal conduct. Violence prevention will require an interdisciplinary effort to address those risk factors associated with violence, and build on assets and capabilities among youth, families, and communities.

Over the last two decades in the United States, public health practitioners, policy makers, and researchers have charted new territory by increasing the use of public health strategies to understand and prevent youth violence, which has traditionally been considered a criminal justice problem. The utilization of public health approaches has generated several contributions to the understanding and prevention of violence.

Public health addresses the health problems of populations (neighborhoods, cities, states) using epidemiology to identify the major problems; understand the factors; follow rates of morbidity and mortality; design, implement and evaluate programmatic and policy oriented prevention strategies.

In essence, the Public Health Model to violence reductions accomplishes the following:

- Defines the Problem
- Identifies Risks and Protective Factors
- Develops and Tests Prevention Strategies
- Continually optimize intervention methods
- Facilitate widespread adoption

F. Justification for a Public Health Approach to Violence Reduction

The public health approach to preventing violence offers several key contributions (Mercy & Hammond, 1998):

- First, and most important, a proactive approach, committed to changing the social, behavioral, and environmental factors that encourage violence and to identifying policies and programs that help prevent violence.
- Second, a public health approach that can facilitate the prevention of violence by helping community members see violence as a problem that can be understood, solved, and prevented. It can further help by providing the information and skills individuals need to choose alternatives to violence.
- Third, this approach advocates a multidisciplinary scientific effort that is directed explicitly toward identifying effective methods of prevention.
- Fourth, public health's tradition of integrative leadership facilitates the organization of a broad array of scientific disciplines, organizations and communities to work together. This ability to unify the various scientific disciplines is pertinent to violence prevention and establishes links with entities representing education, labor, public housing, media, business, medicine, and criminal justice.
- Fifth, public health plays an essential role in building the scientific foundation for developing effective treatments and therapies to mitigate the physical, psychological and cognitive consequences of injury.
- Sixth, public health brings a long standing commitment to support and facilitate communities in solving problems, which is the central role.
- Finally, the public health approach offers a breadth of potential solutions from different systems of influence to address the problems of violence simultaneously for various populations.

Implementation of the public health approach involves a four step process:

1. Define the problem by obtaining information such as the demographic characteristics of the persons involved, the times and places where the incidents took place, the relationship of the actors, and the severity and costs of the injuries.
2. Identify why the incidents occurred so as to define populations at high risk and suggest specific interventions.
3. Evaluate the efficacy of existing programs, policies, and strategies, and then develop and test new interventions based on the information obtained in previous steps.

4. Implement interventions and measure their prevention effectiveness. This requires developing guidelines and procedures for putting programs in place, and then continuously improving and assessing them as specific challenges are encountered and addressed.

G. Elaboration of Suggested Violence Reduction Model

CEA agrees with the CDC that depressed economic conditions within a given community can foster significantly higher levels of violence. Perceived oppression, and the resulting feelings of inequality and powerlessness, are also underlying components of many types of violence. An unsupportive home life, including physical or psychological abuse, can contribute toward subsequent violent behavior. A sense of isolation and fear for one's personal safety can also adversely affect one's ability to resolve conflict without violence. Thus, it is quite clear that over-dependence on law enforcement alone for reducing youth violence is loaded with liabilities and invites further affliction of our youth in Greater Pittsburgh region

The CEA paradigm for violence reduction is a modified version of the public health strategy, which includes three major components: (a) Prevention, (b) Rehabilitation, and (c) Development. Suggested public health strategy includes only the first two-- prevention and rehabilitation. CEA added "development" to help maintain progress in reduced violence. A brief description of this strategy and necessary action include the following:

Prevention-- consists of interventions that help avoid factors that directly foster or consistently associate with violence, including:

- * Working with abused and neglected children and their parents,
- * Truancy and school dropout prevention, expanded school curricula to aid needy students, supervision after school,
- * Curfew centers, offering at-risk youth adult mentoring activities,
- * Manhood and womanhood development programs,
- * Job training initiatives, enhanced educational opportunities,
- * Spiritual awakening activities, and
- * Development of youth leadership and think-tank institutes.

Rehabilitation—Violence diffusion is focused on the enabling of victims, former offenders, and communities toward recovery, including:

- * Community street-reach, conflict mediation, rapid response to shooting incidents for intensive case management,
- * Trauma center, which can address seriously injured victims and their physical and psycho-emotional recovery,
- * Violence reduction centers, and gang hostility diffusion,
- * Rehabilitating offenders from drug abuse and dependency,
- * Criminal justice intervention for violent offenders,
- * Services for reintegration into community life (reentry support, housing, employment, financial management, and social support networks),
- * Mental health services for victimized families as well as perpetrators, and
- * Family support services, and spiritual enrichment.

Development-- is a process of community enhancement to revitalize neighborhoods and maintain progress (contextual enrichment).

- * Town-Hall meetings focused on quality of life,
- * Community clean-up, management of vacant buildings and enhanced landlord responsibilities,
- * Community driven business investment and economic development initiatives,
- * Community-wide social/recreational activities and adequate and engaging playgrounds,
- * Distributive health services and medical care,
- * Community volunteer management,
- * Media focus on positive youth—(decriminalization of African American neighborhoods),
- * Elaboration and expansion of sport, music and art programs for youth and talent refinement, and
- * Enhanced opportunity for focused youth engagement with exemplary adults and faith based organizations.

H. Intervention process

In addition to above, the violence reduction strategy calls for following intervention process:

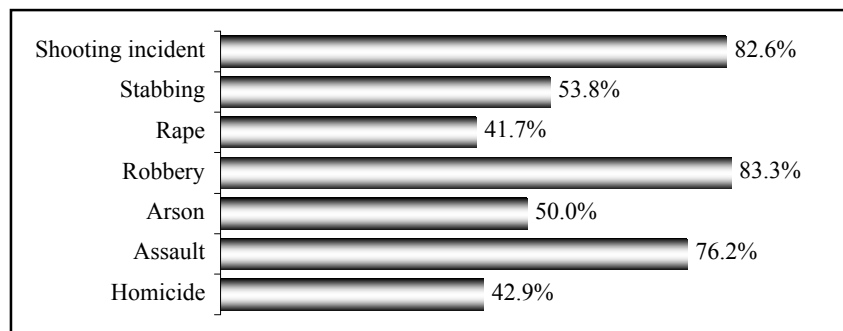
- 1. Community Leadership and Partnership Development--** violence victimizes community residents and, therefore, active leadership must arise from communities-- not just from public offices, universities, and other powerful institutions. The leadership role includes a focus on translating community-based wisdom to practical application of effective programs and policy development;
- 2. Capacity Building--** resource investment to improve and strengthen what already exists. The result is an increase of service capacity (intervention specialists, resident volunteers, youth engagement) and an improvement of service management and effectiveness, and community support;
- 3. Surveillance--** facilitate ongoing community involvement efforts to improve detection, reporting, and follow-up of cases and victimized individuals and families;
- 4. Research--** conduct scientific assessment of community assets and liabilities, service needs, and identification of best practice intervention models to advance the science of violence reduction; and
- 5. Communication--** all major stakeholders (community residents and service providers, public and political offices, local foundations, universities, etc.) to be on same page about selected intervention strategy, community needs, service capacity and effectiveness, and progress indicators.

I. CEA Neighborhood Violence Survey 2010: Overview of Findings

On November 13, 2010, Community Empowerment Association (CEA) initiated a Town Hall Meeting on Violence Reduction. An estimated number of participants exceeded 200 residents, community service providers, academic representatives, media, and public office holders. A survey was distributed as a pilot study. Major findings follow.

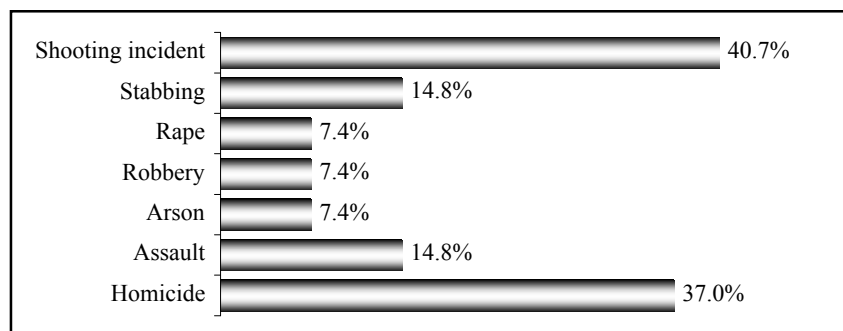
1. Type of violence incidents. Chart 1 below well delineates an extremely high intensity of violence. For example, it is appalling that 82.6% of participants at the CEA town hall meeting experienced a shooting incident within their own neighborhoods during the past year. The chart also shows that participants also reported experiencing amazingly high rates of other types of violence as well (i.e., homicide, robbery, stabbing, rape, arson, and assault).

Chart 1- Distribution of town hall meeting participants' experience of violence in their own neighborhood during the past year



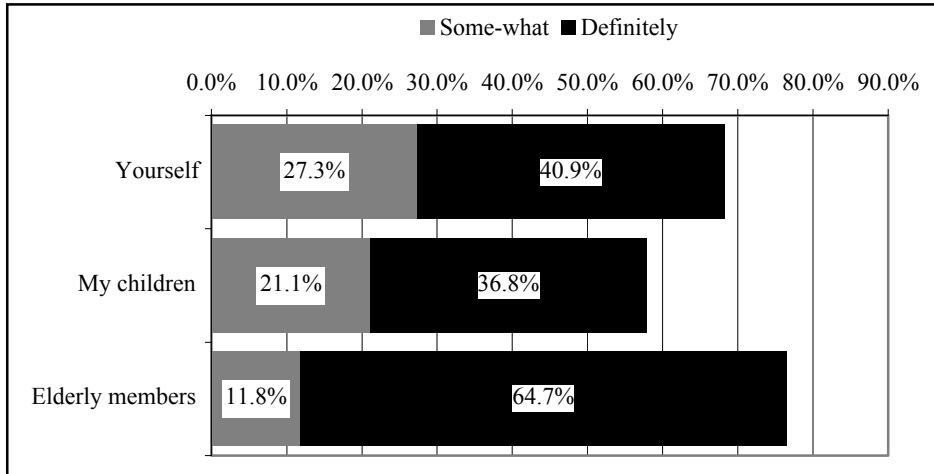
2. Family victims due to violence. A noticeably high (70.4%) number of participants indicated that members of their families were a victim of at least one type of violence. For example 4 out of 10 participants' family members were victims of a shooting incident. Consequently, the homicide rate of family victims is also noticeably high-- over one-third (37%) (See Chart 2).

Chart 2- Distribution of family victims to violence



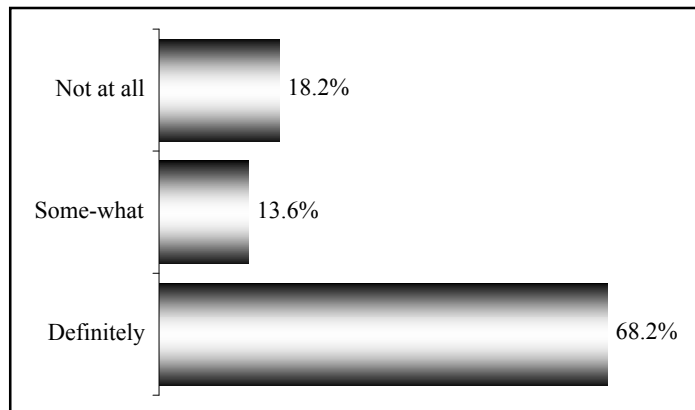
3. The incidences of violence and associated mental health problem. Based on the town hall meeting participants' assessment, elderly members were greatly affected by the incidences of violence-- 64.7% of elderly members reported showing definite signs of a mental health problem (e.g., anger, anxiety, depression, etc). Next in line were participants themselves and then their children (See Chart 3).

Chart 3- The incidences of violence and associated mental health problem



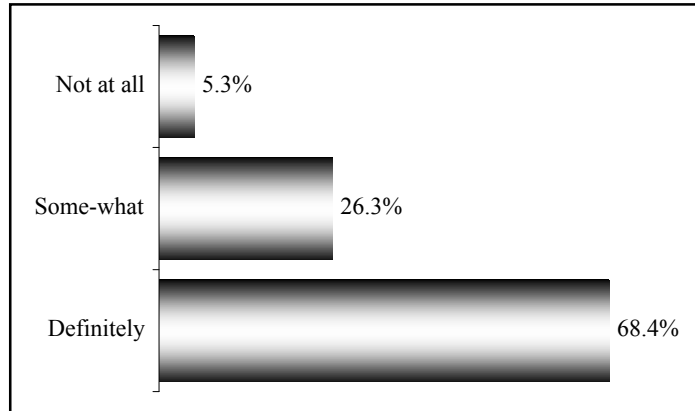
4. Taken-over by violence. Participants were asked, to what extent do you feel that your neighborhood streets are being taken over by violence? As Chart 4 indicates, nearly 7 out of 10 respondents (68.2%) felt that their neighborhood streets are being taken-over by violence. (See Chart 4)

Chart 4-- Taken over by violence



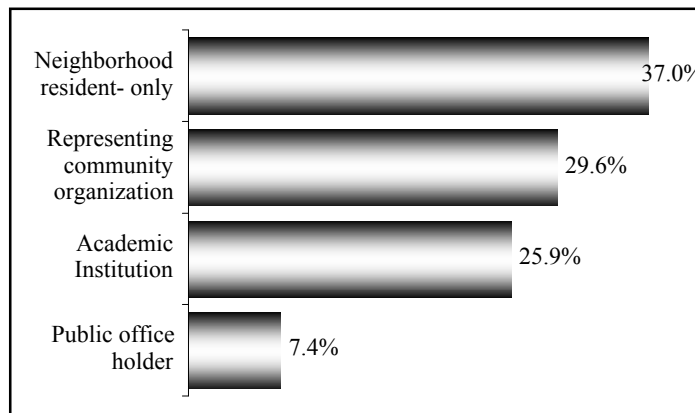
5. Vote of Confidence-- A Leadership by Community Empowerment Association. A high majority (nearly 7 out of 10 respondents) definitely felt that the Community Empowerment Association (CEA) should take the leadership on violence reduction through collaboration with other community-based organizations (See Chart 5). Including those who indicated "somewhat", nearly 95% issued their vote of confidence to CEA.

**Chart 5- Leadership Votes for
Community Empowerment Association on Violence Reduction**



6. Town Hall Meeting's Survey Respondents' Profile. Although all participants were residents of their neighborhood, nearly 30% and one-quarter of respondents were representatives of community organizations and academic institutions, respectively. Relatively few respondents were public office holders. (See Chart 6)

Chart 6- Survey Respondents' Profile



J. Recommended Steps Toward An Integrative Approach To Violence Reduction

Moving toward a more integrative approach to reduction of violence calls for multidisciplinary collaboration to: (a) share and capitalize scientifically based knowledge and qualitative perspectives on the issues that fuel the cycle of crime; (b) promote public investments in effective intervention strategies; and (c) advance public safety by increasing crime-free behavior, instead of sentencing more people into jails and prisons.

A successful public intervention also depends on the collaboration of neighborhood residents with community-based, civic, religious, cultural, educational, and public organizations. It is indeed true that, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Thus, ending violence will necessitate a focused empowerment of people in each neighborhood. This can best be achieved through neighborhood coalitions and their effective community leadership and organization.

Therefore, Community Empowerment Association, Inc. recommends the following 12 functions as the citywide initiative to address root causes of violence for reduction, including; (1) create the Peace Alliance Network; (2) develop a Commission; and various responsibilities and roles for (3) government (Mayor, County Executive, Governor, and Public Officials); (4) faith based organizations; (5) community based organizations; (6) communities at large; (7) universities; (8) local businesses; (9) schools; (10) health institutions; (11) parents; and (12) youth.

1. Create the Peace Alliance Network

Peace Alliance Network should be convened to take leadership on violence reduction by: (a) implementing a public health approach to violence and obtaining buy-in from the communities most affected; (b) gathering community data on problems and solutions; (c) generating recommendations for policies to the Commission for further development and submission for legislative changes both locally, and nationally; (d) creating a groundswell of community support of the Public Health Approach and the Commission for legislative changes. The Peace Alliance Network should be represented and inclusive of following organizations:

CEA, NAACP, Urban League,
African American Chamber of Commerce,
Faith Based Organizations,
Educators (Schools, Colleges, Universities),
Public Officials,
Fraternities and Sororities, and
Other Community Based Organizations

2. Develop a Commission

The Commission is a multi-sectarian and inclusive coalition designed to broker opportunities with mainstream systems for communities, families and at risk youth. Major tasks of the Commission with its interdisciplinary members include: (a) review recommendations of policy and legislative changes provided from the community; (b) develop policy and legislative changes to address root causes as disseminated through the public health approach based upon scientifically proven outcomes; (c) take legislative and policy recommendations to government for adoption into law for systemic changes of institutions that historically support devastation of our community.

This interdisciplinary team will focus on accurately framing the issue of homicides (mainly due to gun violence) as a public health issue rather than a gun control or law enforcement issue, while also addressing the root cause of violence. This Commission will also identify communities (hot spots) where violence most occurs and help develop a collaborative partnership with community based organizations that have outstanding relationships with the targeted group, community stakeholders, residents, and youth to assess community needs. Additionally, the Commission must develop an intervention strategy (community based and community driven) that encompasses:

- How the Commission can begin to broker opportunities with mainstream systems for communities, families and at risk youth related to the prevention, intervention and development model of a public health approach to violence reduction,
- Making sure that adequate levels of resources are available to implement the plan and that the community based organizations doing the work have ample resources to provide the services needed,
- Making sure that the plan is community based and community driven,

- Developing and implementing a capacity building strategy that offers training to individuals who will execute the plan,
- Developing a Violence Prevention Center-- a day center for adjudicated youth (re-entry and after care guidance), at risk students (first-time offenders), and youth interested in developing entrepreneurial enterprises,
- Monitoring the projected outcomes, making adjustments where necessary, and
- Disseminating scientifically based information about integrative approaches to policy advocacy, development, and modification (including justice reform).

The Commission should include the following representative membership from various disciplines:

Community Grassroots groups,
 Community Based Organizations,
 Street Organizations,
 Faith Based Organizations,
 Community residents,
 Former incarcerated residents,
 African American Leadership,
 Department of Human Services,
 Public Safety Department,
 Health Department,
 Universities,
 Mayor's Office,
 County Executive's Office,
 Public Political Officials,
 School of Social Work,
 Graduate School of Public Health,
 Mayor's Office,
 County Executive's Office, and
 Public Political Officials

3. What the Government (Mayor, County Executive, Governor, and Public Officials) Can Do

The Mayor's office, County Executive Office and Public Officials have primary responsibility for seeing that the policies of the City of Pittsburgh are implemented by working closely with Council and other stakeholders to ensure that desirable outcomes are achieved.

This leader group has ultimate authority for directing resource and spending priorities in accordance with local needs and preferences, and must communicate recommendations that improve health, security, and comfort of the community residents. More specifically, the Mayor's office, County Executive Office and Public Officials can do following tasks:

- Provide resources and seed money to the Commission for the development of a comprehensive violence reduction/prevention plan,
- Make the case for a public health approach to violence reduction that provides a comprehensive and multidisciplinary response to ensure effective and sustainable efforts,
- Support the paradigm shift in violence reduction from a reactionary focus to a commitment to prevention,

- Push towards public health policies to address issues of youth and community violence that are preventative in nature,
- Establish an ongoing, interdisciplinary working group to address violence from a Public Health Perspective,
- Develop a Commission,
- Address social and economic risk factor that lead to crime, such as:
 - ✓ Poor Living conditions,
 - ✓ Low education/illiteracy,
 - ✓ Lack of employment opportunities,
 - ✓ Poverty Exclusion discrimination,
 - ✓ Poor housing,
 - ✓ Inferior Schools,
 - ✓ Underutilization of land,
 - ✓ Lack of support for black business,
 - ✓ No workforce strategies for employment opportunities, and
 - ✓ Racism and discriminatory practices.
- Create an indicator of economic and social equity that would focus on whether the distribution of benefits is equitable across communities,
- Assist in creating youth micro-enterprise and business incubators,
- Support and promote reintegration strategies that focus on incarcerated youth as they re-enter society, related to:
 - ✓ Education, Job Training & Placement,
 - ✓ Housing, and
 - ✓ Restoring driver license privileges.
- Support community benefits agreements, local hiring and other strategies that would include community residents in workforce development.
- Create racial and disparities impact reports which should be attached to every piece of legislation and major criminal justice policy that detail the impact on the black community, and
- Assist justice systems to partner with community stakeholders in fashioning institutional responses to violence reduction.

4. What Faith Based Organizations Can Do

Faith-based organizations have long been essential components of the community and neighborhood safety net. Congregations (including churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples) and social service organizations with religious roots (such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services) have provided emergency food and shelter, child-care, and other forms of assistance, particularly for low-income residents. We now need their focused assistance on violence reduction. Examples of necessary services are as follows:

- Give spiritual consultation to families who have lost children to violence,
- Develop and provide space for counseling centers with support groups to deal with grief and healing,
- Develop spiritual renewal campaigns,
- Collaborate with other denominations in addressing youth violence,

- Become members of block watches and street clubs,
- Establish a “Call to Action and Reconciliation Day,”
- Adopt a block for resident safety,
- Organize ongoing Community Prayer Vigils,
- Encourage congregations to become agents for change in their communities,
- Encourage previous residents who “made it” to move back into the neighborhood and/or continue to give back to their “hood”,
- Identify congregation members who have skills to teach youth and ask them to volunteer to do so,
- Reach out to at-risk youth living nearby and engage them in positive conversation and activities, and
- Open places of worship in the evenings for youth activities.

5. What Community Based Organizations Can Do

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have always provided certain services to low-income children and families, particularly in the areas of child welfare and adoption, family preservation, special needs child care, transportation, and addressing the needs of low-income families. We now need CBOs to further engage in violence reduction assistance by holding public forums (i.e. town hall meetings, speak-outs, educational forums) to hear from parents/residents on specific needs related to public safety, education, community and economic Development, and Job creation, training and opportunities. They must also:

- Work collaboratively and in partnership with the Commission.
- Develop relationships with community residents and other groups to make sure that the information from the Commission gets back to the community.
- Develop and facilitate outreach teams for conflict resolution, peace treaties, cease fire agreements.
- Utilize available recreational and other facilities to engage youth in healthy and safe activities
- Be sure to target hard to reach adjudicated youth for reentry, human services, and community-wide activities
- Develop food pantry programs, safe housing networks, transitional housing and relocation programs.
- Develop work to school programs in conjunction with community partners
- Provide specialized assistance programs for young people 18-24 who are attempting to change behavior
- Include violence impacted youth in community and social mobilization -- including youth with disabilities
- Collaborate with local, state and social welfare organizations, health education and recreation programs, youth employment, street gang worker programs, victim assistance organizations, hospitals, schools, disability and other advocacy organizations to coordinate and provide services.

6. What Communities Can Do

Knowledgeable communities have the great potential to help improve the collaborative efforts of violence reduction practitioners, intermediaries (e.g., public officials, law enforcement, school and university administrators, etc.) and applied researchers to reduce violence. Communities should also be encouraged to make sure that churches/mosques are open and involved with community residents

during non-traditional church times for outreach and mentoring activities. Examples of what communities can do are as follows:

- Build a Base-- CEA recommends that communities begin their violence prevention work by building a broad-base coalition of support and participation, including professional community who bring science and power to the table,
- Organize Community Educational Forums on Violence Prevention,
- Reach out to at risk youth to offer coaching, points of wisdom and structure,
- Communities should develop political action committees to guide the decision making process of public officials,
- Community residents should become responsible citizens (i.e. reviewing records of prospective candidates, voting) to make sure that public officials develop policies and are held accountable for decisions made that address community needs,
- Living after murder:
 - ✓ Bring people with similar losses together to begin to address the issue of violence at a broader community level,
 - ✓ Address the emotional consequences of loss – candlelight vigils – community forums and other activities, and
 - ✓ Develop counseling centers with support groups to deal with grief and healing.
- Convene and advance outreach/street-reach teams to facilitate conflict resolution/truces within problem areas,
- Support Brother-to-Brother and Sister-to-Sister outreach activities,
- Developing block watches and street clubs, and
- Fraternities and Sororities – Adopt a school.

7. What Universities Can Do

Universities need to engage in constructive scholarly and scientifically based activities for social development and improvement. The primary social responsibility of the universities is to fulfill its role as a centre of learning and free inquiry with focus on improving quality of life for all individuals. Additionally, local universities must share the resources they are awarded with the Commission, and conduct following tasks:

- Recognize grassroots organizations as experts in community strengths and needs.
- Build upon the research on peer assisted violence termination,
- Investigate violence cessation among youth and interplay of individual situational and structural factors,
- Investigate crises faced by injured youth, whether these present conflicts, identify what skills and supports are needed to achieve and maintain healthy functioning to sustain behavior change,
- Expand the use of participatory and action research methodologies,
- Promote child and youth centered research agendas,
- Open up an avenue for educational and employment opportunities within the university for resource poor communities and young people,
- Identify why violent incidents occurred so as to define populations at high risk and suggest specific intervention,
- Evaluate the efficacy of existing programs, policies and strategies, and develop and test new interventions,
- Implement interventions and measure their prevention effectiveness,

- Develop neighborhood violence indicators-- help monitor level of violence,
- Assess prevalence of factors already known to associate with youth violence and victimization (e.g., abused and neglected children, supervision after school, truancy and school dropout rates, availability of job training initiatives, level of drug trafficking, etc.),
- Identify specific neighborhoods' socio-cultural and community risk and protective factors associated with youth violence (e.g., family structure, drug abuse and dependence, availability of already existing community-based organizations, faith based community development efforts, youth leadership opportunities, etc.),
- Collaborate directly with the Commission in designing assessment methods and data gathering strategies,
- Develop and publish scientific journal articles on violence based on Pittsburgh data and in collaboration with the Commission,
- Develop policy modifications working collaboratively with the Commission, and
- Offer policy/research internships, training for community residents.

8. What Local Businesses Can Do

Local business organizations must consider the interests of communities by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on communities and other stakeholders as well as the environment -- not only customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders. This obligation extends beyond the statutory responsibility. They must also voluntarily take further steps to improve the quality of life, not only for employees and their families, but also for the local community and society at large.

Examples of what local business organizations can do include:

- Invest resources back into the community,
- Conduct entrepreneurship training,
- Offer internship opportunities,
- Offer apprenticeship trainings and opportunities,
- Commit to hiring within the community,
- Commit to participating in community activities and provide resources where needed,
- Committee to economic development of the community
- Provide living wage, and
- Invest in youth micro-business entrepreneurial ventures.

9. What Schools Can Do

Schools are responsible for serving communities to enable each young individual to grow into inspired, productive, and fulfilled lifelong learners (PA Department of Education, 2008). Schools should explore the possibility of also becoming multi-service centers for the following reasons:

- ✓ Schools are particularly important places in our communities for violence intervention. Schools need to be restructured as multi-service centers for children and families.
- ✓ In addition to being academic centers, schools need to become sites for a multitude of activities that address the needs of children and promote the active participation of families and other community members.

- ✓ They cannot be isolated fortresses, standing apart from the community in order to give the illusion of safety, not if children are the central focus. They must be places of nurturing that promote success and not failure

Other roles and responsibilities should include following:

- Make sure that there are on-going grief counseling services available for students when needed,
- Strengthen dropout prevention/truancy programs,
- Provide meaningful community service opportunities,
- Provide supervision and intensive service opportunities for high risk youth,
- Revisit and modify zero tolerance and expulsion policies to serve in the interest of youth
- Alternative programs for students who aren't doing well or are having trouble fitting in, as an option in lieu of suspension and expulsion,
- For older children and teenagers, schools should become as important as community and service centers for children and families, and staffed accordingly,
- Service programs that should be located in schools include: health centers, mental health services, a range of after school programs, organized and supported by parents; evening family events such as dinners, talent shows, book clubs that include parents; mentorship programs, and school trips with parents as chaperone

School buildings are often underused, yet they can be places where many activities happen that can bring together all aspects of community.

- Think about what these buildings can be, when they are places that promote the success of children, full family and community centers.
- Now think about what the message is when these things are absent!
- What does it mean when art, sports, music, shop, home economics, and other non-traditional and non-academic areas disappear, and when school buildings are locked after 2:30 or 3:00 pm and on weekdays?
- When parents are uninvolved and uninvited?
- When failure rather than success is the experience of a significant number of students?

By changing public policy and professional practices, we can ensure the success of our children.

Additional examples of what schools can do include:

- Hire more African American male Teachers,
- Collaborate with parents, teachers, businesses to provide educational, and social, recreational activities for youth and families,
- Develop curriculums that are culturally relevant and historically accurate,
- Utilize sports programs: (1) as pathways to academic achievement; and (2) to engage parents to be actively involved with their children,
- Offer evening programs that address educational and recreational needs,
- Invest in school-to-work programs,
- Hire community residents that know the children,
- Support and participate in Commission activities,
- Develop student focus groups on violence prevention, and
- Make school relevant to the reality and life experience of students.

10. What Health Institutions Can Do

There are many contributing factors that explain disparities in health status for African American Youth-- poverty, poor access to care, cultural incompetence (race and teen population), affordability, health insurance coverage, and distrust of health care providers among African Americans. Thus, examples of what local health care institutions can do include:

- Develop a community index of health neglect based on psychological and developmental measures,
- Offer an array of health services at schools-- school-based health clinics,
- Target minority teenagers' health care needs,
- Focus on improving screening, management referrals and coordination of care,
- Expand free clinics and volunteer doctors and nurses to serve the poor,
- Increase cultural sensitivity training among health care practitioner (race and teen population),
- Engage in community-wide events, workshops, and social events to dispel fear and distrust of health care establishments among African Americans,
- Create innovative models of care to reach out to families and youth who need access to care,
- Offer transportation services to medical facilities,
- Offer community-wide health fair-- information sharing, and
- Focus on reducing environmental hazards.

11. What Parents Can Do

It has never been said, that children were easy to raise! They don't come with guidelines or instructions, and they certainly don't come with a pause button. What they do come with is a crucial set of physical and emotional needs that must be met. Failure of the parents to meet these specific needs can have wide-ranging and long-lasting negative effects. Regarding violence prevention, parents must take active role in:

- Providing an environment that is safe,
- Continually teaching morals and values,
- Developing mutual respect with your child,
- Issuing effective discipline, involving yourself in your child's education, and
- Last but not least, getting to know your child!

Additionally, parents can:

- Become positive role models for your children and other youth in the community.
- Establish boundaries for your children and enforce them,
- Stay actively involved in your children's educational experience,
- Become very active in your child's parent-teacher association,
- Attend parent-teacher conferences on a consistent basis,
- Eliminate guns in your home that your children can have access ti,
- Speak out against violence and any issues that negatively impact your family or community,
- Hug and show love to your child everyday! Don't give up on your children.
- Know where your children are spending time – their friends and activities,
- Encourage your children in positive ways,
- Do not accept money that is unaccounted from your children,

- Support your child’s ambitions,
- Strongly encourage your children against violent behavior and make sure that they know the impacts and consequences of those behaviors,
- Lead by example, and have positive people in your lives,
- Learn how to ask for help, when needed,
- Spend daily quality time with your children,
- Respect your children. Make consistent efforts to communicate with them on their level,
- Become aware of any city-wide (or otherwise) plans that impacts your families, and
- Become a voice in addressing issues related to your community.

12. What Youth Can Do

What the youth can expect in the years to come will depend on how well they understand and leverage their rights (e.g., protective, educational, and legal), and how willingly and efficiently they are able to shoulder their personal and social responsibilities (e.g., enhance self-reliance, promote well-being of the community, social justice, and voluntary service). Examples of what youth can do include:

- Stay away from drugs, alcohol, guns & criminal activity,
- Voice your concerns/needs with parents or positive adults,
- Participate in community activities,
- Organize & participate in summits and develop a united voice to address youth concerns,
- Participate in community forums, meetings, focus groups to voice interests,
- Volunteer in community organizations to learn new skills,
- Stay in school, excel and finish school,
- Seek positive role models and learn from them,
- Commit to becoming the best civic citizen you can be,
- Respect your parents and your self,
- Pursue your dreams and aspirations, and
- Reach out to organizations that can help you

K. Public Policy Recommendations

Allegheny County should have policies for a long-term reduction of youth and young adult violence which includes but is not limited to the following:

- Increase the funding base for programs that help children, adolescents and adults to develop negotiation, communication, anger management, problem solving, mediation and coping skills that exclude violence as an acceptable form of resolving conflict. Also help with family management issues.
- Develop and support anti-violence programs which emphasize teaching pre-adolescents and adolescents to build emotional, cognitive and creative abilities as well as academic, vocational, social and cultural competencies required for healthy adulthood.
- Expand and provide resources for anti-violence programs to emphasize both, perpetration as well as victimization prevention.
- Policies that explicitly foster a caring ethic and focus on strong adult-child relationships.

L. Pittsburgh's PIRC Needs Support

Several years ago, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and Councilman Ricky Burgess announced the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime (PIRC) to implement a crime reduction strategy aimed at reducing violence among youth. Although their well-intended commitment to crime reduction is admirable, recent homicide rates show serious disappointments! A majority of the U.S. cities, which adopted this initiative, have focused on measuring the "success" rate based on short-term periods when many of the offenders are as yet released from the prisons, during premature violence gap periods-- awaiting resurgence and given more time. Additionally, Pittsburgh is unlike the other major US cities in which this initiative has been introduced (e.g., Boston, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, and Chicago). Our city offers a unique set of issues associated with neighborhoods' poverty, drug abuse and dependency patterns, educational achievement, and employment opportunities. This initiative has unfortunately ignored expert opinions provided to the city by following sources:

The State of Black Youth In Pittsburgh – Urban League of Pittsburgh

Black Papers on African American Health In Allegheny Count - University Center for Social and Urban Research/University of Pittsburgh/Urban League of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh's Racial Demographics: Differences and Disparities – Center on Race and Social Problems/University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work

Coalition Against Violence – B-PEP

Get Out to Vote Campaign – B-PEP

Violence in Pittsburgh - One Vision One Life

Community Empowerment Association, Inc. – *over 20 years of working with youth and families impacted by violence*

PIRC is a hyper-law enforcement initiative designed by David Kennedy (Director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at City University of New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice), which is built on a single assumption-- gun violence will stop when offenders understand that they will be convicted when they shoot somebody. This initiative relies heavily on aggressive law enforcement and criminal justice system ("get tough" paradigm), which will keep the offenders in prisons as long as legally possible. This is another attempt to feed the 'cycle of incarceration' with the mass institutionalization of young men of color and virtually ignoring the inadequately addressed social conditions in education, economic opportunities, housing, poverty, child welfare, race and health that in fact create the conditions for violent behaviors to exist.

This aggressive enforcement is also loaded with potential liability of young people mistakenly caught in the sweep because they happen to fit the profile of or look like those who are truly involved. Besides, offenders already know that they will be convicted (if caught) when they commit violent acts – the media gives daily reports on violence convictions, etc. and the fact that our prison system is growing at phenomenal rates is a public knowledge. As such "get tough" tactics to produce "understandings" that will reduce "violent attempts" do not work and are not realistic methods to stop gun violence. Hopelessness abounds in our communities.

City of Pittsburgh needs a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses violence from a public health paradigm, inclusive of community, school, public health, and law enforcement. The public health approach to violence reduction includes three major components-- prevention, rehabilitation, and development. David Kennedy's plan offers no specific intervention system for prevention of crime-- just a severely under-funded and loosely organized rehabilitation of offenders -- just an inadequate referral system to social services for "those in need." CEA's suggested comprehensive

public health intervention system uses in integrative approach and interdisciplinary collaboration that addresses the social issues that are fueling violent crime tendencies, thus creating long-term solutions in reducing violence in our communities.

As noted by Pitt researcher Yamatani (2008), the recent criminal justice system of locking up criminals for the sake of public safety and eventually releasing them without rehabilitative intervention support, simply increases the vicious cycle of crime. Although crime-weary public may be appeased with the PIRC's intentions, without serious incorporation of the public health interventions, it is doomed to a failure, and recent events support this prediction. PIRC's short-term gain is simply awaiting long-term breakdown.

M. Addressing Risk Factors

It is indeed true that social disorganization is a predictor of violence among neighborhoods where concentrated poverty exists. Sadly, there is a strong possibility that residents of these neighborhoods will be exposed to, witnesses and/or become victims of violence. Unfortunately, witnessing violence is a significant predictor of youth becoming future victims or perpetrators of violent behavior. Thus, communities must be protected by addressing major risk factors based on following perspectives:

- Children learn violence in every venue of their lives and reducing this message of countering it is the responsibility of all.
- The exposure of children to violence in homes, schools, and the community should be addressed by all community institutions.
- There are obvious things that can be done that enhance learning of pro-social behaviors (for example – conflict resolution curricula in schools and other community settings) family supports (for example, home visiting programs, crisis hot lines, family centers, parenting and nurturing programs), role modeling (for example, mentoring programs, teacher trainings), youth programs (for example youth centers, after-school programs, organized recreational activities).
- Economic development in poor communities has to be a part of violence prevention. The benefits of improving the economic conditions in poor inner-city communities are considerable and affect all of us whether we live in these communities or not.
- Reducing poverty should be approached from the perspective that it would benefit resource poor communities as a whole in innumerable social and economic ways, reduced violence and violent injury rates being one of them. It should be rooted in real economic opportunity and development that leads to establishment of strong economic bases in these poor communities, not handouts. These communities are rich in human resources but lack the financial resources to get started.

N. Final Thought

As noted previously, the surge in violence is the product of social conditions that exist in communities across the nation. We have more crime because we have more poverty and the problems it produces; we have chronic unemployment, not only because of economic conditions, but because of serious racial disparities and inequities. As a result, we have more uneducated, hurt, and confused

youth and young-adults—brewing in bitter emotions—leading themselves into misguided and harmful situations, which is reflective of an unconscious push towards (self) genocide.

This problem is going to persist until we have a salient urban policy that directly addresses the needs of the young people-- specifically the needs of Black youth and young adults. We desperately need well-designed intervention strategies. Youth need hi-quality education and school-to-work skills training. Youth need to understand profound components of culture; they need a thorough understanding of their own history and how to live a lifestyle that encompasses the principles and values of their culture. They need recreational and cultural activities that will enrich their lives. Community services in these areas are under-funded, irrelevant, and/or non-existent.

What we are experiencing today is a direct result of increasing levels of poverty, social neglect and deprivation, and family misery compounded by the unbridled influx of drugs and guns in our communities. Do not let these avoidable deaths be in vain! Our actions must be deliberate, swift, and solved based on unity among all involved! They must be well planned and executed on a continuous basis until desired results occur: short term—sharp decrease, long term—elimination of violence!

Our children are shaped by what we do for them! Each community’s children and youth are extremely valuable resources. We need to treat them all with respect, nurture their development, protect them from harm, teach them good values, discipline them for appropriate reasons, and look out for their well being. They will eventually reflect what we have invested in them.

Please, join us to remember loved ones lost to violence as well as to discuss and bring forth action oriented solutions in response to the violence plaguing our communities. The changes we seek must begin with all of us!

“It is easier to raise healthy children than to repair broken adults”

--Frederick Douglass

For more information regarding above recommendations and to become part of the solution, please contact: T. Rashad Byrdsong, President and CEO of Community Empowerment Association, Inc., 400 N. Lexington Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15208. Telephone: (412) 371-3689. Email: TRByrdsong@ceapittsburgh.org.

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO VIOLENCE REDUCTION

“Youth violence is preventable, not inevitable. It is a predictable behavior in the unsafe environments where people live. Rooted in a complex set of underlying issues, violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned or not learned in the first place.” (UNITY)

How do we effectively prevent violence before it occurs

- City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County need an intervention system that incorporates a comprehensive public health paradigm, which views crime as a preventable social disease.
- Preventing violence before it occurs involves efforts to address the risk factors associated with violence, and builds on assets in youth, families, and communities

Why do we need to view violence from a public health perspective?

- As a leading cause of injury, disability and premature death, violence is among the most serious health threats today.
- The victims and perpetrators, as well as those who witness violence, are highly impacted and often suffer adverse health outcomes.
- The consequences for those affected are severe, including serious physical injuries, post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and other longer term health problems associated with biopsychosocial effects of such exposure.
- Despite the public health implications, the traditional response to violence usually defaults to law enforcement, in which after-the-fact strategies such as incarceration are employed.
- As violence jeopardizes the health and safety of the public, violence needs to be recognized as a public health issue.
- Moreover, public health should serve as the focal point for forging new, upfront strategies to prevent violence and improve the quality of life for all. (Hammond, R. Division of Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention)

What are the major components of an intervention system that incorporates a comprehensive public health paradigm to violence reduction?

- **PREVENTION**—working with abused and neglected children and their parents, truancy and school dropout prevention, expanded school curricula to aid needy students, supervision after school, curfew centers, offering at-risk youth adult mentoring activities, manhood & womanhood development programs, job training initiatives, enhanced educational opportunities, spiritual awakening activities, and development of youth leadership and think-tank institutes.
- **REHABILITATION**—community outreach, conflict mediation, rapid response to shooting incidents for intensive case management, violence reduction centers, gang group diffusion, rehabilitating offenders from drug abuse and dependency, criminal justice intervention for violent offenders, services for reintegration into community life (reentry support, housing, employment, financial management, and social support networks) mental health services for victimized families as well as perpetrators, family support services, and spiritual enrichment.
- **DEVELOPMENT**—working with community groups, schools, employers, media, and health service providers to revitalize neighborhoods (e.g., town-hall meetings, community clean-up, management of vacant buildings, enhanced landlord responsibilities, business investment, safe playgrounds, community-wide social/recreational activities, distributive health services, community volunteer management, media focus on positive youth—decriminalization of communities of color.

What are the benefits of approaching violence from a public health perspective?

- Public Health is charged with addressing threats to population health and safety
- Public health is data-driven
- Public health is collaborative
- Public health is prevention-oriented
- Public Health is committed to decreasing disparities in morbidity and mortality
- More resources are available to address the issues effectively

***Twenty-One Standards
for a Healthy African Community***

**Standards, Values & Principles that Guide the Socialization & Education of African
Children, Families & their Community:**

1. Parents, Grandparents, Children, Friends, Neighbors take responsibility for each other
2. If you see someone in trouble, help immediately
3. Help, Guide, Support, Acknowledge and Correct every child
4. Greet every member of community with love and respect
5. Ask for help before there is a crisis
6. Provide help/support before being asked
7. Share what you know and what you've learned – that which helped you
8. Acknowledge the help you have received
9. Celebrate each other's success
10. Remain connected to Family/Community even when it hurts
11. Work through problems together
12. Hold each other accountable to what is right and good
13. Inspire each other, especially Children and Elders
14. When success comes, share it – help others succeed
15. When failure comes, be willing to receive support and accept responsibility
16. Be good to one's self in order to inspire others
17. Get up, show up and take part in building/maintaining community
18. Respect Elders, Family, and Community as core to having a good life
19. Get education, training, and personal development
20. Acknowledge spirit as essential to Community Life and Cultural Heritage
21. Never give our Children up

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