



Mayor's Commission for a

SAFER CHICAGO

Strategic Plan for 2015



Executive Summary

There is no greater priority or more urgent challenge for the City of Chicago than the safety and education of its youth. While violent crime in Chicago has declined 28% over the past three years—reaching a nearly 50-year low—violence remains unacceptably high in too many Chicago communities, and disproportionately impacts its young people.

Mayor Emanuel has made reducing violence a priority of his administration, directing his cabinet to create and implement a multi-disciplinary, coordinated approach to **stop the cycle of violence by addressing its root causes**, including lack of economic security, exposure to trauma, disconnection from school, and involvement in gangs and the justice system.

As a forum city in the U.S. Department of Justice's National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, Chicago has spent years developing and implementing a holistic strategy to address youth violence. The result is a broad spectrum of programs designed to **prevent** violence by fostering resilient families and communities, **intervene** with youth who are at risk for becoming involved in violence, and **respond** to active conflicts and the most serious and chronic offenders.

The Mayor's Commission for a Safer Chicago is the next step in this process, bringing together over 130 City staff, community and faith leaders, practitioners, subject matter experts, parents, and youth to update the City's plan to address youth violence.

This report, the Commission's first, is the result of intensive collaborative work throughout the fall of 2014. The Commission was tasked with updating for 2015 the City's strategic plan for youth violence prevention, with recommendations that build on current investments and leverage existing City and community resources. In keeping with its shared belief that **violence is preventable, not inevitable**, the Commission focused for this report on strategies designed to identify and intervene with youth at risk for becoming involved in violence.

The Commission made recommendations in **five issue areas**, each designed to address the risk factors and root causes of youth violence.

► Youth Employment

In conversations with youth and community members about violence, a common theme emerged: to stop violence, youth need to be prepared to work and have access to quality jobs. To build on the success of the One Summer Chicago summer job program, the Youth Employment working group arrived at the following recommendations for 2015:

- ★ Develop and pilot a common curriculum focused on workforce readiness and career planning during the summer.
- ★ Design a “training bridge” to continue workforce skills training after the completion of a summer job.
- ★ Cultivate richer employer partnerships to increase the availability of job opportunities for youth and prepare youth to be successful in those jobs.
- ★ Survey 1000 One Summer Chicago Plus participants to assess their skills, interests, and educational needs, and use the survey results to connect them to existing year-round education and employment opportunities.

► Health and Healing

Childhood exposure to trauma and violence puts youth at significantly greater risk than their peers for a range of negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, repeat victimization and violent behavior. To promote a shared understanding of the effects of trauma, treat trauma in the aftermath of violence, and provide training on trauma-informed care, the health and healing working group made the following recommendations:

- ★ Pilot a homicide crisis response model to provide immediate support for victims and families in the wake of a homicide and to facilitate referrals to ongoing services.
- ★ Develop common training standards for trauma-informed care and the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).
- ★ Pilot the incorporation of ACEs screenings into standard intake procedures for healthcare providers.
- ★ Map opportunities to engage families impacted by trauma, to analyze service gaps and identify frontline workers who need training on best practices.
- ★ Extend opportunities for teen dating violence prevention education to all CPS schools and faculty.
- ★ Identify and publicize ways in which community members can become involved in efforts to address the effects of childhood exposure to violence and other traumas.

► Creating Restorative School Communities

Youth who are engaged in school and learning are at lower risk for violence. Chicago Public Schools has worked with stakeholders and partners to develop strategies that get students to school; keep them on track by overcoming academic hurdles; and replace the zero tolerance discipline policies with “restorative practices” that prevent and de-escalate conflict by addressing the underlying causes of personal conflicts and misconduct. The working group made recommendations designed to further engage schools, parents and community members in the use of these restorative practices:

- ★ Establish 3 new community-based restorative justice hubs to support and complement the restorative practices work being undertaken in schools.
- ★ Train and place parents into at least 4 new schools to participate in and help lead restorative practices.
- ★ Create a principal challenge grant program to encourage principals to develop and implement proposals to employ restorative practices in their schools.
- ★ Develop a restorative practices “Toolkit” of techniques and support materials to help schools expand their use of restorative practices.
- ★ Conduct coordinated principal outreach and peer-to-peer education.
- ★ Develop and promote a restorative practices education campaign for parents and community stakeholders that includes an experiential learning component.



► Safety and Justice

The Safety and Justice working group tackled two different but related issues: diverting low-level juvenile offenders away from the justice system and connecting them with services; and fostering mutually respectful interactions between officers and youth.

For 2015, the working group recommended the following strategies to divert low-level youth offenders and connect them with services designed to address the causes of the criminal activity:

- ★ Expand the RISE diversion pilot, which connects youth to intensive mentoring and group counseling, to serve more juvenile offenders and reduce travel times for participants.
- ★ Identify best practices for engaging parents to help identify the drivers of misconduct and connect families to services.
- ★ Develop alternatives to arrest for first-time youth offenders.

Youth want police in their communities to help keep them safe, but feel disrespected by police. Police officers have had firsthand contact with violent and sometimes disrespectful offenders and may overgeneralize from those experiences. The working group made the following recommendations to help break down communication barriers and build mutual faith and respect:

- ★ Expand Bridging the Divide, a toolkit developed by the YMCA and the Chicago Police Department that uses creative dialogue methods, in conjunction with activities like photo competitions and poster series, to engage youth and police in meaningful conversation, healing, and relationship-building.
- ★ Host a Community Policing (CAPS) competition to encourage and recognize officers who develop innovative ways to build better relationships with youth.
- ★ Create a mini-grant program through which youth can seek funding in support of youth-led projects to address violence in their communities.

► Safe Spaces and Activities

For children and families living in neighborhoods affected by violence, safety concerns can hinder participation in recreational activities. Many City and partner organizations, however, offer safe spaces and positive programming for youth and families in neighborhoods impacted by violence. The Safe Spaces and Activities working group considered strategies and recommendations to ensure that all youth in all neighborhoods have access to, and are aware of, safe spaces to gather, play, and participate in appealing activities in their community:

- ★ Create a process for youth to provide ongoing input to the Park District about their evolving needs and interests.
- ★ Build a single, mobile-device-friendly source for information about program opportunities throughout the City.

- ★ Enlist high-profile ambassadors to publicize and create excitement around program opportunities.
- ★ Engage community volunteers to mentor, coach, and provide positive activities and presence in spaces and on transport routes that may be perceived as unsafe.
- ★ Promote a system that matches facilities that have existing unused space with organizations that need space for their programs.
- ★ Develop a coordinated plan for safe transport to activities in 3 target neighborhoods.

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