Revitalizing Neighborhoods and Engaging Youth

A report from the Prevention Research Center of Michigan and the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

Contents

3 Introduction

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

4 Youth Violence Prevention Center

6 Youth Violence Prevention Through Environmental Design

FOCUS ON YOUTH

8 Youth Empowerment Solutions

10 Flint Adolescent Study Gen2

11 Addressing School Safety, Mental Health, and High School Transition

12 Publications

14 Find us online

15 Contact Information

Introduction

Dear Reader,

Faculty and staff from the University of Michigan Prevention Research Center and the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center have worked with partners in the Flint and Genesee County communities for over two decades. Over the past few years, Flint has been front and center in the news because of high rates of crime and violence, and more recently the water crisis. What we see in the news, however, doesn't tell the story of the tremendous efforts and successes of community residents and leaders to restore Flint's vitality and vibrancy.

In this report, we highlight some of those initiatives and our role in evaluating their results.

First, we describe three core projects, Community Engagement and Revitalization, Youth Violence Prevention through Environmental Design, and Renew the Avenue, that focus on neighborhood revitalization and greening activities to reduce crime and prevent violence. These initiatives are in partnership with local community groups that are working toward improving neighborhoods through a variety of activities such as community gardens, improved lighting, and lawn maintenance.

These projects have grown out of our earlier work that supports the idea that empowering communities, and especially youth, to improve the social and environmental spaces in which they live can have positive effects on the health and safety of the entire community. All of these approaches are aimed at promoting busy streets. Busy Streets are places where residents and visitors feel at ease, where businesses and community services are present, and where people are active and engaged.

A second theme of our work in Flint is youth empowerment and positive youth development. We report on two of our longstanding studies, Youth Empowerment Solutions and the Flint Adolescent Study, which have helped inform other youth-focused initiatives in the community.

In addition, we briefly describe two new youth-focused projects in collaboration with Michigan State University. The first provides mental health first aid, restorative justice and school climate improvements in Genesee County Schools. The second studies the effects of victimization on children's transition from middle school to high school.

The Flint community faces many challenges. In partnership with the local community organizations, schools, law enforcement and residents, we are finding solutions to these challenges. The overarching goal of all of these efforts is to create environments where families can thrive and youth can look forward to safe and healthy futures.

In good health,

Marc Zimmerman, Director
Susan Morrel-Samuels, Managing Director

Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

YVPC

During the 1950's and 1960's, the city of Flint was a prosperous metropolitan area due to many high paying industrial and manufacturing jobs. The departure of most of the automotive factories has since led to decreased availability of work and subsequent population loss. As a result, Flint has an abundance of vacant and blighted land, and violent crime is a persistent problem. Research has shown that caring for vacant properties can have beneficial effects of the health and safety of residents in the area. [1]

The Michigan YVPC (MI-YVPC) is partnering with the Genesee County Land Bank to study the effects of this program on crime and perceptions of safety within the surrounding areas.

Since its inception in 2002, the Genesee County Land Bank has worked to address the blight in their community. The Clean and Green program of the Land Bank is an innovative approach to maintaining and improving these areas. The Land Bank works with community organization members who take on the responsibility of

The MI-YVPC focuses on a novel combination of three promising approaches to violence prevention:

Empowering youth and adults to create change in their communities and improve their physical and social environments

Greening activities such as mowing and planting gardens to revitalize neighborhoods and reduce crime and violence.

Creating Busy Streets to provide safe spaces for residents to connect and for communities to thrive.

"From Broken Windows to Busy Streets"

The phrase ***busy streets*** emerged from the perspective that one way to reduce crime and violence is to generate community connectedness and vibrant neighborhoods that are consistently populated and filled with positive social interactions.

Both developing out of and in reaction to the prevailing "Broken Windows Theory," which described how the negative aspects of a community can propagate and lead to social dysfunction and crime, the concept of "Busy Streets" focuses on the assets of a community and how their positive influences can proliferate to work against crime and violence. Based on this community-centered variation of the "safety in numbers" principle, the MI-YVPC aims to engage residents and local organizations in creating, invigorating, and building upon community assets that can make streets busy and vibrant.[2]

[1] Krusky, et. al. (2015). The effects of produce gardens on neighborhoods: A test of the greening hypothesis in a post-industrial city. Landscape and Urban Planning, 136, 68–75.

[2] Aiyer, et. al. (2015). From Broken Windows to Busy Streets A Community Empowerment Perspective. Health Education & Behavior, 42(2), 137–147

cleaning and mowing properties in their neighborhoods. Many of these organizations involve youth in their efforts.

The Genesee County Land Bank maintains over 1800 vacant lots, and has garnered national recognition for their efforts.

Past investigations into neighborhood improvements have shown a strong association with reductions in violence. This project is building upon that research base by comparing the results of youth-engagement in neighborhood greening to unmaintained areas, as well as to vacant lots that have been cared for professionally. In other words, does involving the community, and specifically youth, in the greening process make a difference?

We have expanded this work to Youngstown, Ohio and Camden, New Jersey where neighborhood organizations are also involved in caring for vacant lots.

In both Flint and Youngstown, community organizations and youth are caring for vacant properties through mowing, cleaning, gardening, and other "greening" activities in their neighborhoods. In both cities, we will be studying the effects of the vacant lot improvements on rates of violence, property crimes, and intentional injuries in the area. In our final year, we will take what we have learned to Camden, NJ, and conduct an implementation study to test best practices for translation and dissemination.

The results of the study will inform the development of best practices and a comprehensive implementation guide to be made available to communities across the country that are interested in using greening strategies to prevent violence and create safe and vibrant neighborhoods.

MI-YVPC is a collaboration among University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University, economic development, land use, law enforcement, public health and community organizations.

MI-YVPC is funded by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U01CE002698).

For more information, visit our website at yvpc.sph.umich.edu

Youth Violence Prevention Through Environmental Design

RENEW THE AVENUE

The University Avenue Corridor Coalition (UACC), is a broad based collaboration of universities, community organizations, and law enforcement that formed with the collective goal of revitalizing the University Avenue area of Flint, Michigan. This corridor connects a major hospital and two universities with the downtown area. Over the years, it has also experienced much disinvestment and neglect.

The UACC is working with partners on two new projects to improve neighborhood safety and reduce crime, Youth Violence Prevention Through Environmental Design (YVPTED) and Renew the Avenue, a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program. The goal is to transform the University Avenue corridor into an attractive and crime-free community conducive to sustainable development. Activities include eliminating blight and cleaning up crime hotspots, stabilizing land use, establishing leisure and recreation areas, improving communication links, maintaining sidewalks, adding more lighting and providing recreational opportunities. The Michigan YVPC is leading the evaluation for these activities and their effects on crime, neighborhood perceptions, and youth violence.

These neighborhood empowerment activities are based on the principles and theory of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Originally coined in the 1970s, CPTED methods became more popular in the early 2000s. The methods were developed as a multidisciplinary approach to reducing criminal behavior through

improvements and changes to the physical environment. Consistent with the *Busy Streets Theory*, and the *Greening Hypothesis*, CPTED is based on the idea that simple changes to a physical space, such as improvements in lighting, or putting up an open fence on an unused corner lot, can show others that the area is looked after, and can in turn, reduce opportunity for crime.

The overall strategy for the UACC CPTED projects involves focusing law enforcement intervention, increasing community engagement, and reducing blight in the area. In the long-term, the coalition is improving safety within the study area and implementing strategies that are replicable and scalable to other areas of Flint.

The MI-YVPC will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of these activities. The evaluation strategy includes analysis of police records and injury data from local health centers, as well as a community survey, and assessment of property conditions. The research team will share the results with the community through public meetings and online.

CPTED Principles:

The following CPTED principles guide the work of the MI-YVPC, the UACC, and their community partners.

1. **Territorial Reinforcement** refers to activities and physical features of a community, such as a fence or a mural, that show care and ownership, communicating that a place is claimed for positive activity, not crime.

2. **Surveillance** refers to enhancied visibility, which discourages unlawful behavior and helps neighbors look out for one another. Surveillance can be natural (e.g. busy streets), organized (e.g. a neighborhood watch) or mechanical (e.g. security cameras).

3. **Maintenance (Image Management)** refers to the creation of clean, bright and well-tended spaces that encourage neighbors to take pride in their community, and discourage crime and vandalism. Maintenance can include refreshing a coat of paint, sweeping streets, or fixing playground equipment.

4. **Access Control** refers to effective placement of entrances and exits that enable residents to observe activity, identify concerns, and prevent unwanted access. Established walking pathways create a clear way to move through a space.

5. **Lighting** promotes a sense of safety by allowing people to observe their environment and identify potential threats. Lighting on a walking path or bike trail encourages people to feel safe and comfortable participating in positive, recreational activities.

6. **Environmental Cues** bring together the use of multiple CPTED principles and send a clear message that a location is a safe place. Neighbors are likely to feel safe at a busy community event with effective lighting, clear entrances, and neighbors who are looking out for one another.

7. **Social Management:** Communicating a clear purpose for a space invites positive activity and behavior.A vacant lot is vulnerable to vandalism because it has no clear purpose, while a park with running trails invites recreation. Well-designed places and events direct activity in ways that help neighbors have fun, build connections, and improve their community.

New Partnerships

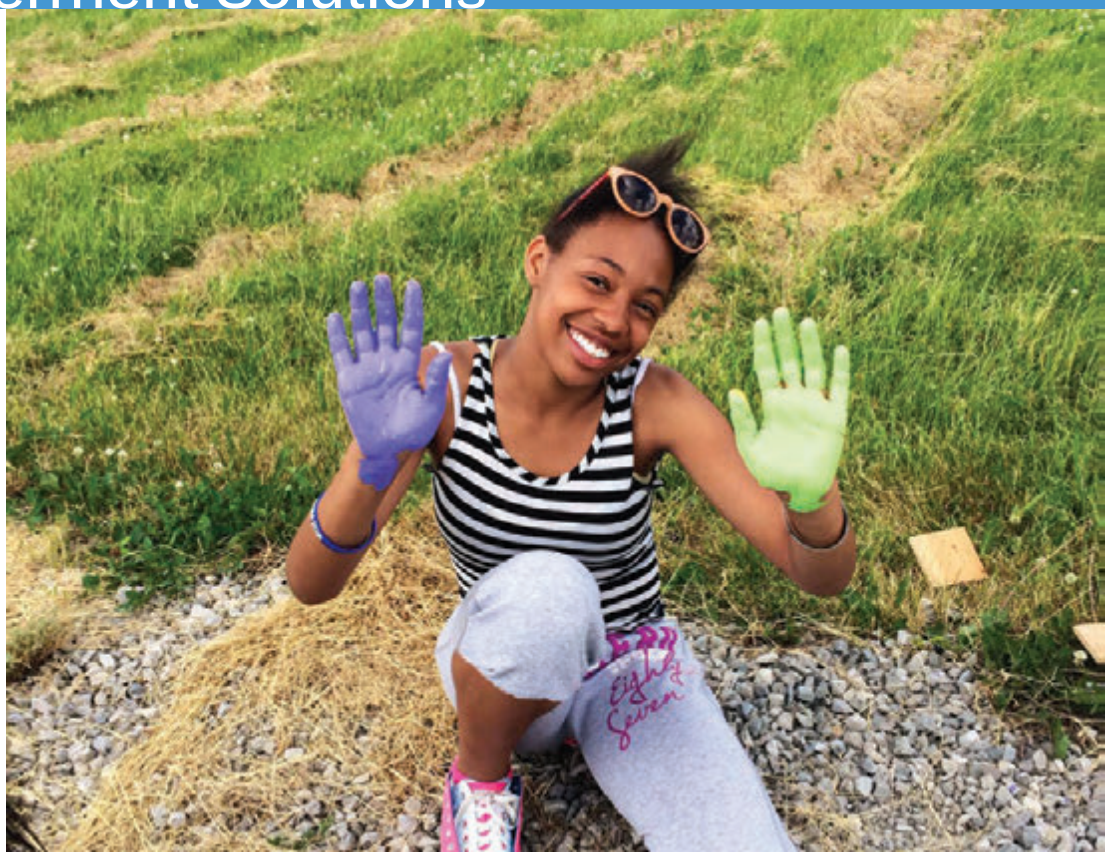
A unique aspect of these projects is the partnerships that have formed between institutions and organizations to bring together expertise across multiple disciplines.

In addition to bringing together academic community partnerships, such as our connection with the UACC, these grants have facilitated research collaborations among many universities, including Kettering University, the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice, the University of Michigan-Flint, and the University of MIchigan School of Public Health.

YVPTED is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Renew the Avenue is funded by the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program of the US Department of Justice.

Youth Empowerment Solutions

YES ADAPTATIONS



Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) is a 16-week after school program that focuses on providing opportunities for youth to create change in their own communities.

Since it was first introduced in Flint, Michigan in 2004, the program has been implemented in communities across the U.S. and has been adapted to different populations, including alternative high school students, Mexican American youth, and Nigerian youth.

The curriculum is available for public download, so that schools and youth organizations all over the country can make use of the YES program in their communities. Training, consultation, and assistance are available for new YES program staff to help them carry out the curriculum effectively in their own settings.

YES is currently being tested in a randomized controlled trial in multiple schools. Early results indicate positive developmental outcomes and reductions in delinquent behavior.

The YES curriculum, adaptation guide, as well as an evaluation guide are all available on our website at yes.sph.umich.edu

YES joined forces with STRYVE (Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere), which is a national youth violence prevention initiative led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The local health departments in four STRYVE cities elected to incorporate the YES program into their violence prevention strategies: Boston, MA, Houston, TX, Salinas, CA, and Portland, OR. YES faculty and staff worked with the CDC Foundation to guide and study the implementation and adaptation of the YES curriculum in each site. The sites tailored the curriculum to their individual needs while preserving the essentials of the program. This collaborative process informed the development of the adaptation guide that may now be downloaded along with the curriculum.

The guide is designed for individuals who are responsible for selecting, supervising, and carrying out youth programs. It first identifies the core components of YES, explaining why they are essential to the success of the program. There is a framework for assessing the need for any adaptations. Then, a green, yellow, and red-light system is used to demonstrate how certain aspects of the curriculum may be changed without compromising the core components.

For example, "adding relevant cultural references" and "adapting to developmental, language, or literacy issues" have a green light, whereas "substituting lectures for interactive activities" has a red light because this change is likely to compromise one or more of the core components.

The guide includes a worksheet for individuals to reflect on the success of the adaptations they made and the feedback they received.

An example of a YES adaptation...

The STRYVE site in Salinas, CA adapted the YES curriculum to Mexican-American youth. For example, rather than focusing the teamwork and cultural identity exercises on the Civil Rights Movement, they included a discussion about the importance of teamwork in the Farm Worker Movement (which helped many Mexican American farmworkers win rights such as safe drinking water and required rest periods).

Participants then watched a related video, talked about the changes Mexican Americans in Salinas wanted today, and completed an art project that integrated what they had learned about the history of the struggle for farmworkers' rights and the current issues facing Mexican Americans in California.

GREEN LIGHT GO	Not likely to compromise core components
YELLOW LIGHT PROCEED CAREFULLY	May compromise core components or alter how components work together
RED LIGHT STOP	Likely to compromise core components or alter how they work together.

FAS
Generation 2

The Flint Adolescent Study (FAS) is a longitudinal interview study of risk and promotive factors associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drug use across a lifetime.

In 1994, FAS researchers recruited a cohort of 850 youth from the Flint Community Schools. They followed the sample of predominantly African American youth for 4 years in high school (1994-1998), 4 years after high school as the participants experienced the transition to young adulthood (1999-2003), and another 4 years during their late twenties as they experienced middle adult transition (2008-2012).

The original goal of the study was to explore the promotive factors associated with school dropout and ATOD use across four high school years. Over the years, the study explored additional risk and promotive factors and health outcomes including social support, mental health, neighborhoods, and violence.

Now in their 30's, FAS participants are parents to over 400 children aged 5-16 years old. The Flint Adolescent Study - Generation 2 expands on the scope of the original study to explore how parenting factors are associated with children's alcohol and drug use and other risk factors.

Resiliency Framework

Unlike many other studies that examine vulnerability and risk in African American samples, FAS focuses on assets and resources and positive factors in the lives of African American youth. This resiliency framework provides a theoretical basis for exploring what helps youth avoid the negative effects of risks they face.

How have the data been used?

The study has resulted in a rich dataset used as the foundation for many other PRC programs, including Youth Empowerment Solutions, Fathers and Sons, and has supported the proposals for the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Centers.

FAS findings: Neighborhood Influences

adverse neighborhood conditions can contribute to stress, poor coping, and mental health problems

living in disadvantaged neighborhoods increases physical and psychological stress and exerts physical and psychological tolls on youth

involvement in positive neighborhood activities protects against neighborhood risk

residential stability in a neighborhood results in reduced psychological stress

FAS data are now being archived at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) and are available online.

Questionnaires, scales and data for other years are available upon request.

Visit the Flint Adolescent Study website for more information: http://fas.sph.umich.edu.

Flint School Safety Initiatives

We have embarked on two new projects in collaboration with Michigan State University to address school safety. The first will provide mental health first aid, restorative justice and school climate improvements in Genesee County Schools. The second will study the effects of victimization on children's transition from middle school to high school.

Addressing Mental Health and School Safety

Studies have shown that by the onset of high school, 20% of youths have been bullied in school. Even before this, the years of early adolescence (i.e. 11-12 for girls, 13-14 for boys) are when incidences of delinquency among youth exhibit sharp increases. Verbal or physical trauma in schools can have ramifications on mental health. Furthermore, evidence suggests that over half of all mental disorders become apparent before age fourteen.

An intervention has been designed to address this issue in middle schools via three main avenues: implementing a restorative justice framework to resolve conflicts between students, increased use and access to mental health first aid, and promotion of a positive school environment. The intervention will be evaluated for efficacy and sustainability in a randomized controlled trial that will include 20 schools over two years.

School Safety and High School Transition

The transition to high school can be a time of stress and unrest for anyone, but for youth from communities that have a peak in exposure to violence during this time, the transition can be especially critical to mental health, school completion, and longer-term economic well-being. So far, students' perceptions of school safety, the threat of victimization, and their knowledge and use of protective community resources have been understudied for their effects on the transition experience.

This new project, in partnership with MSU's School of Criminal Justice and Flint Community Schools, is studying these factors and how they affect the transition to high school, the genesis of school violence, and the behaviors that students employ to protect themselves from being victimized. Data will be collected via survey of 7th-10th graders from 10 schools, as well as through a qualitative study of 100 8th and 9th grade students.

For more information about these projects, visit our website at yvpc.sph.umich.edu

Publications

The effects of produce gardens on neighborhoods: A test of the greening hypothesis in a post-industrial city

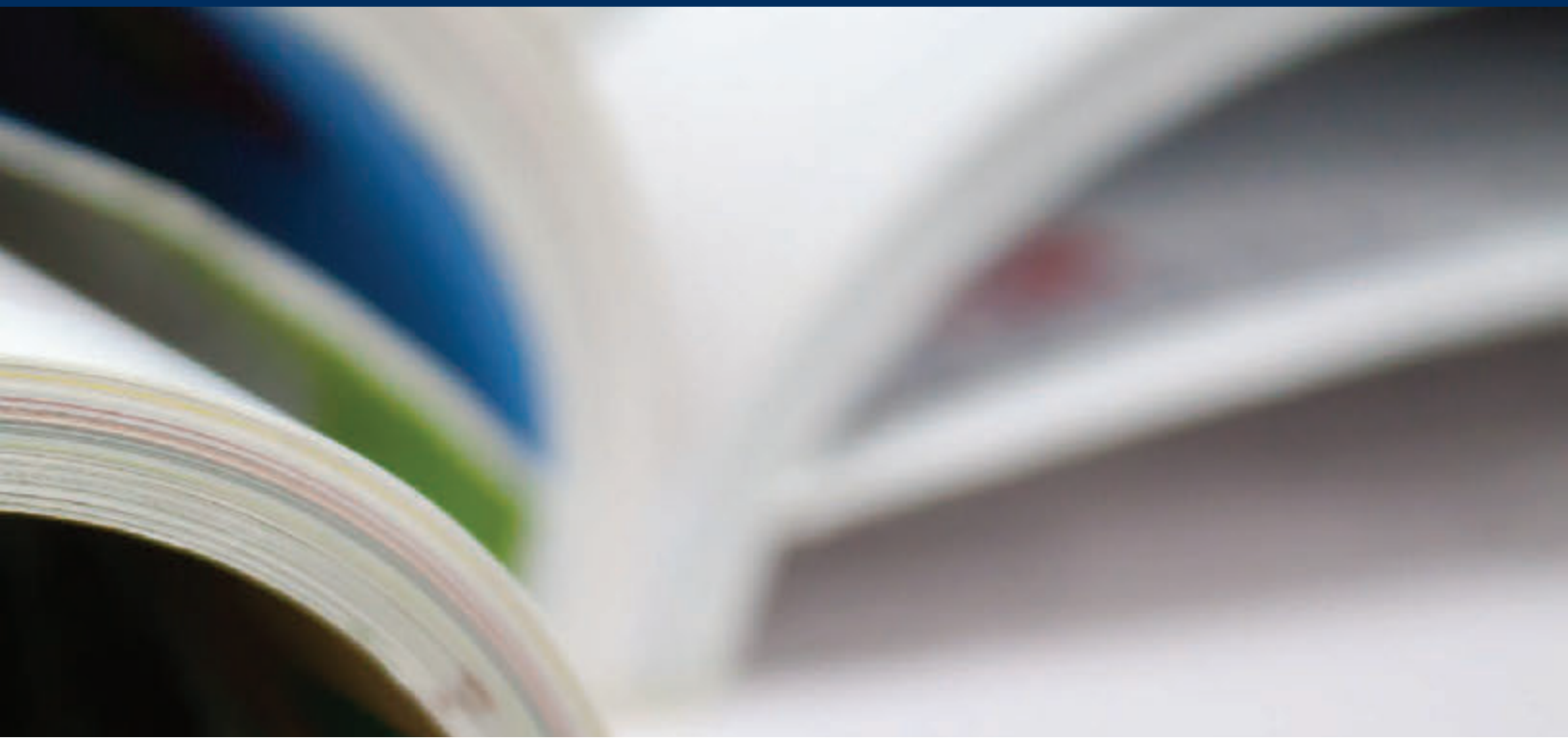
Krusky, A. M., Heinze, J. E., Reischl, T. M., Aiyer, S. M., Franzen, S. P., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2015). The effects of produce gardens on neighborhoods: A test of the greening hypothesis in a post-industrial city. Landscape and Urban Planning, 136, 68–75. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.12.003

This study tested the Greening Hypothesis by evaluating if produce gardens on reclaimed vacant lots can have a positive effect on the surrounding residential parcels. Researchers examined yard maintenance of residential properties located near a produce garden, compared with those near an undeveloped vacant lot. The study area was urban and residential with higher than normal levels of property abandonment and urban blight. Researchers found that residential parcels near to produce gardens were better maintained than parcels near undeveloped vacant lots, supporting the Greening Hypothesis. These findings support policies and programs which include greening initiatives as part of community development strategies.

A Comprehensive Prevention Approach to Reducing Assault Offenses and Assault Injuries among Youth

Heinze, J. E., Reischl, T. M., Bai, M., Roche, J. S., Morrel-Samuels, S., Cunningham, R. M., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2016). A Comprehensive Prevention Approach to Reducing Assault Offenses and Assault Injuries among Youth. Prevention Science: The Official Journal of the Society for Prevention Research, 17(2), 167–176. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0616-1

From 2010-2015, the CDC-funded Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC), worked with community partners to implement a comprehensive prevention approach to reducing youth violence in Flint, MI, based on public health principles. The authors present the results of the combined effects of six programs in reducing assaults and injury among 10-24 year olds in the intervention area relative to a matched comparison community. Results indicated that youth victimization and assault injuries fell in the intervention area subsequent to the initiation of the interventions and that these reductions were sustained over time. The evaluation demonstrated that a comprehensive multi-level approach can be effective for reducing youth violence and injury.



Community Engagement in Youth Violence Prevention: Crafting Methods to Context

Morrel-Samuels, S., Bacallao, M., Brown, S., Bower, M. & Zimmerman, M. Community Engagement in Youth Violence Prevention: Crafting Methods to Context. J Primary Prevent 1–19 (2016). doi:10.1007/s10935-016-0428-5

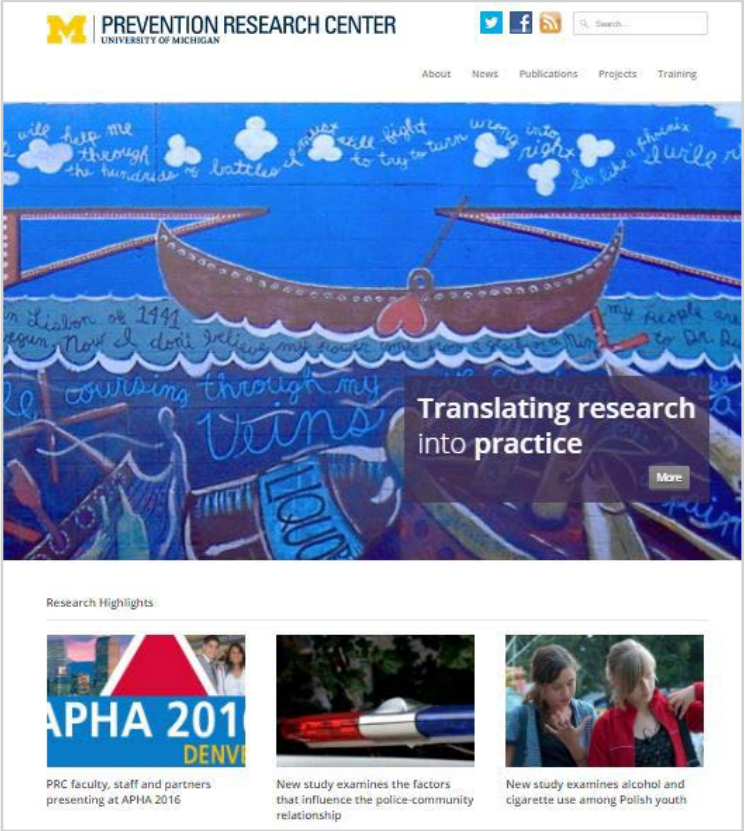
Using a case study approach, this article describes aspects of community engagement employed by three CDC funded youth violence prevention centers operating in different contexts: a rural county in North Carolina, a suburban area of Denver, Colorado and urban setting in Flint, Michigan. The authors describe the methods for community engagement in the YVPC sites and detail the challenges and opportunities that influenced implementation. Although approaches varied by community context, key principles emerged across cultures and geography: trust, transparency, communication, commitment and flexibility.

From Broken Windows to Busy Streets A Community Empowerment Perspective

Aiyer, S. M., Zimmerman, M. A., Morrel-Samuels, S. & Reischl, T. M. (2015). From Broken Windows to Busy Streets A Community Empowerment Perspective. Health Educ Behav 42, 137–147.

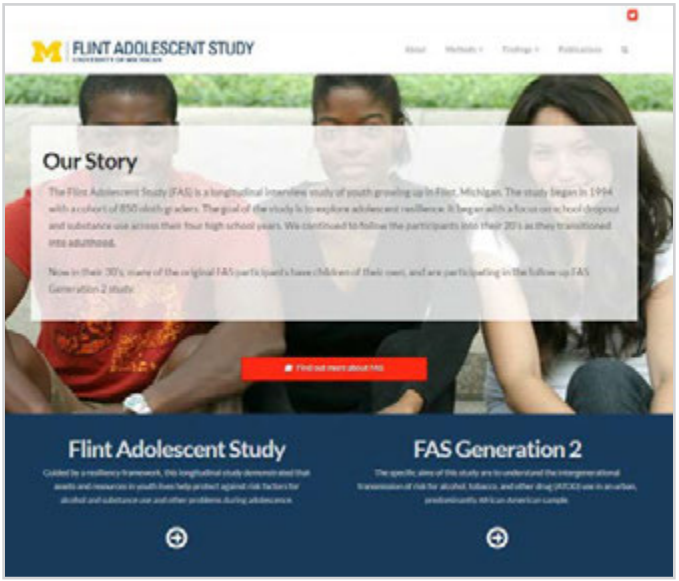
Most existing neighborhood research focuses on the negative predictors and consequences of economic disadvantage and environmental stress.This paper describes the busy streets theory, which states that busy streets create a positive social context where social cohesion, trust, social capital, and collective efficacy thrive. The authors suggest that neighborhoods with busy streets are empowered because such neighborhoods facilitate and foster requisite processes and structures for positive social interactions. Evidence of busy streets is represented by actively maintained, organized spaces, thriving businesses, and visible informal (and formal) social interactions.

Find us online



prc.sph.umich.edu

Our PRC, YVPC, YES, and FAS websites not only offer comprehensive descriptions of current and past projects, but also contain important findings from these projects, news updates, blog posts, and resources for students, other researchers, and community partners. Be sure to check them out!



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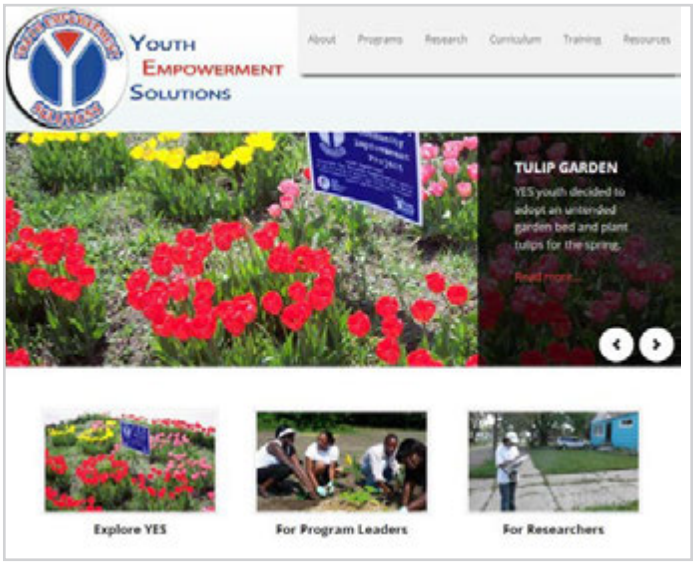

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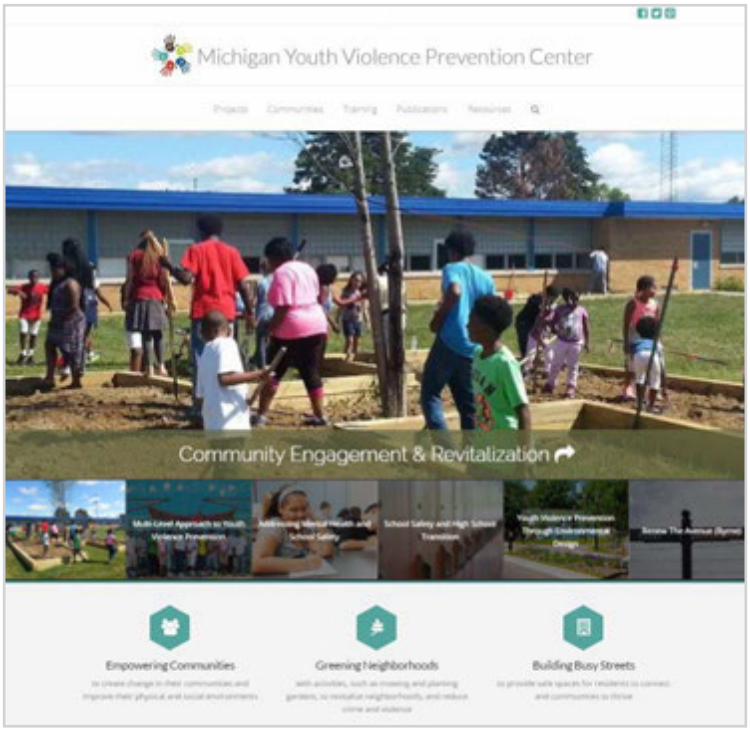

yvpc.sph.umich.edu

PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The Prevention Research Center at the University of Michigan School of Public Health promotes safe and healthy futures through prevention research. Our research builds on principles and theories of positive youth development, resiliency, and empowerment.

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Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

The MI-YVPC, based at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, researches youth violence prevention approaches, collects and analyzes surveillance data, and fosters relationships with local community partners to help develop, implement, and evaluate promising prevention efforts.

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