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Introduction

PROJECT OVERVIEW

MEE (Motivational Educational Entertainment) Productions Inc., a communications company specializing in urban and ethnic audiences, was commissioned by the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Initiative to conduct audience research to identify intervention strategies that will reduce and prevent violence among youth in the city. As part of its socially responsible mission, MEE is committed to eradicating violent behavior through culturally relevant prevention and intervention messages. The findings from this research can be used to direct future violence prevention efforts in Philadelphia, including a citywide social marketing campaign.

As the foundation for a potential campaign, MEE conducted two rounds of focus groups. The first round of groups, the primary focus of this report, consisted of seven (7) focus groups with youth, parents and service providers in Philadelphia. This audience research sought to understand their knowledge and perceptions about the impact of violence in the city. We also sought to determine the types of messages that would motivate the target audiences to take an active role in efforts to create safer communities in Philadelphia, thereby reducing violence in the city, and to determine which messages could help youth positively navigate these issues in their community.

The target audience was local youth and adults, divided into three primary groups: youth/teens; parents and other caregivers; and youth service providers. The initial round of focus groups was focused on understanding the current environment. A second round of six (6) focus groups was conducted to test media messages based on feedback from the groups. Participants reviewed mock-up drafts of preliminary campaign concepts (radio ads, slogans, brochures, posters) to determine their appeal.

This report compiles the analysis, findings and recommendations based on the first rounds of focus group research. It provides an authentic look at the world of Philadelphia parents and youth, particularly regarding the issue of youth violence. It also includes a summary of participant feedback on issues related to potential campaign messages and slogans, outreach strategies and print media concepts.

The report provides detailed, information that can be used to enhance the Blueprint interventions and strategies, particularly for raising awareness and prevention, but also for empowering communities for policy and institutional change. Using the information gathered in this research to promote violence prevention among Philadelphians can be an important first step in addressing more broadly how the public health and criminal justice sectors can work effectively together to reduce violence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research sought to examine several priority areas, including: the target audience's attitudes and understandings toward violence in Philadelphia; the availability and impact of current

violence prevention programs on the target audience(s); and which antiviolence messages and delivery methods will be most effective in reaching the target audience(s).

During the focus groups, Philadelphians voiced their opinions on what they perceived to be one of the city's most pervasive and deep-rooted problems — violence and public safety. They related important information about the environmental and peer influences that impact violence, and were also asked to brainstorm ideas for messages and materials that could be used in a campaign to help promote violence prevention and positive youth development.

Objectives for the first phase of focus group research in Philadelphia included:

1. Identify what Philadelphians think are the most pressing issues in their community and how those issues affect them on a daily basis;
2. Identify the personal and environmental issues surrounding violence and what negative experiences and influences are leading Philadelphia youth to engage in violence;
3. Determine the prevalence of violence in the lives of Philadelphia youth;
4. Determine the availability and accessibility of handguns in Philadelphia;
5. Identify whether and how the support and guidance of adults is influencing and impacting youth violence;
6. Assess the availability and accessibility of culturally-relevant community-based organizations, services and programs for Philadelphia youth that prevent violence or provide effective intervention; and
7. Identify current media messages promoting nonviolence to Philadelphia youth, and their effectiveness in raising awareness of alternatives to violence and of local programs and services that support youth.

MEE examined strategies to prevent the risk of violence among high-risk youth (primary prevention), and reduce further violence (secondary prevention) or the escalation or repetition of violence among youth who are already involved in violent behavior (tertiary prevention). The research findings, analysis and recommendations will lead the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia in its final message and campaign development.

Research Methodology

RECRUITMENT SUMMARY

In the first round of research, MEE moderated one trial group and six primary focus groups with residents from Philadelphia’s hardest-hit neighborhoods. A total of thirty-five (35) youth and young adults, ages 15 to 24, participated in the groups.

MEE also identified and recruited seven (7) parents of children up to age 10 (many also had teens) and a group of service providers (10) who interact with youth in various arenas. Providers represented community involvement and organization, social services, recreation centers, juvenile justice, the public school system and faith-based organizations.

A public health prevention/intervention framework was used in the recruitment process and research design:

Primary Prevention interventions refer to activities and strategies that promote health and safety “upfront” for all members of a community. These include parenting classes, conflict resolution programs, recreational and after-school activities, and efforts to keep guns out of the hands of children. MEE recruited a group of service providers (10) who interact with youth in various arenas. Providers represented community involvement organizations, social services, recreation centers, juvenile justice, the public school system and faith-based organizations. MEE also identified and recruited seven (7) parents of children up to age 10 (many also had teens), as primary prevention targets because of their strong influence as parents.

Secondary Prevention interventions are for youth described as “in the thick.” They address youth who are at risk but have not been expelled from school or incarcerated for acts of violence. Some of these teens/young adults, however, have witnessed significant episodes of violence, have been victimized by violence, and have parents or siblings who are incarcerated. MEE recruited three youth groups — African American males ages 16-18, African American females ages 15-17, and Latino males ages 16-19 to represent this segment of the population. The African American male group consisted of males who could be categorized as both Secondary and Tertiary (below) because of their participation in a local first time offenders program called, “Don’t Fall Down in the Hood.” These males were primarily asked about how best to develop secondary prevention strategies that could help the younger generation avoid the mistakes that they had made in their lives.

Tertiary Prevention represents activities that take place “after the fact” or in the aftermath of a violent tragedy. Including the trial focus group, MEE recruited two groups of African American males to represent this element; both older teens and young adults groups were represented.

As outlined above, youth were recruited based on their level of risk for violence (i.e., primary, secondary or tertiary prevention). MEE recruited youth for the groups by sending out requests for youth referrals via e-mail, phone and fax to members of its local Community Network. (See Attachment A for a list of the CBOs that participated in the focus group recruitment.)

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW ROUND 1 TESTING

Date	Ethnicity/Gender/Prevention Group	Location	Age	Participants
6/20/05	Young Adult AA* Males (Tertiary) [Trial Group]	Kingsessing Recreation Center (SW Phila.)	18-20	6
7/12/05	Teen AA* Female (Secondary)	Community Education Partners	15-17	8
7/23/05	Teen Latino Males (Secondary)	The Lighthouse	16-19	8
7/29/05	Teen AA* Males (Secondary/Tertiary)	Temple University (N. Phila.)	15-16	7
7/11/05	Young Adult AA* Males (Tertiary)	Men United for a Better Philadelphia (N. Phila.)	21-24	6

*African American

Date	Ethnicity/Gender/Prevention Group	Location	Ages	Participants
6/30/05	AA* Parents (Primary)	The Consortium (W. Phila)	n/a	7
6/30/05	Service Providers (Primary/Secondary)	MEE (Center City)	n/a	10

THE RESEARCH TEAM

The research team consisted of both male and female moderators, analysts, and data coders (including young adult coders). MEE’s President/Officer-in-Charge Ivan Juzang, Senior Vice President Alicia Jackson and a violence expert consultant, Chukwudi Onwuachi Saunders, PhD, moderated the focus groups.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Each focus group was videotaped and recorded using traditional qualitative research procedures, to facilitate coding and analysis. The data was then analyzed by MEE to gain insight into the cultural norms and social reality of the participants. This process also helped MEE understand the complex set of behaviors related to violence and violence prevention.

An experienced team of communication experts, public health analysts and a mental health expert, Carl Bell, M.D., conducted the overall data review and analysis. The primary / secondary / tertiary intervention model was overlaid in a matrix with MEE’s own health communications model, which focuses on the development of prevention, retention and recovery messages. The model is based upon more than a decade of effective communication with urban populations who subscribe to an oral communications culture.

The young adult data coders were of the same ethnicity and socioeconomic status as the youth focus group participants, but slightly older (ages 24-29). These coders reviewed and coded the videotaped focus groups to assist with understanding and analyzing youth responses. This labor-intensive process ensures research team familiarity with the content and culture of the focus group participants.

MEE uses an extensive process to code and analyze the qualitative data collected in focus groups. For this project, three distinct, yet interdependent, levels of analysis were used.

Level 1 Analysis: Identification of Themes and Patterns

After each research team member reviewed the focus group videotapes independently, several meetings were held to discuss the focus groups findings. (See Attachment B for the focus group summaries.) Team members identified themes and patterns in the responses of participants, along with similarities and differences. This helped to determine the themes and sub-themes of greatest interest and importance to the project. Through this process, eleven (11) coding schemes emerged as the most important issues for further data coding and analysis:

- Witnessing Violence
- Gun Violence
- Avoiding Violence
- Respect
- Parental Influences
- Non-Parental Influences
- Promotional Channels
- Education/Schools
- Messages to Philadelphia Youth
- Messages to Philadelphia Parents
- Messages to Non-Parental Adults

(See Attachment C for a more detailed chart of the coding schemes.)

Level 2 Analysis: Locating & Collecting Sub-Themes From the Focus Group Videotapes

Once the research team agreed on the coding schemes and the accompanying sub-themes, the young adult data coders were assigned to identify them in the videotapes. Because the coders are from the same culture of the focus group participants, they were easily able to interpret the jargon conveyed in the youth focus groups. Coders watched the groups separately and then discussed their interpretations of what the participants said. A professional video editor combined the relevant clips from each focus group videotape to create separate videotapes for each identified sub-theme.

Because the edited sub-theme clips were compiled from all of the focus group videotapes, it was much easier to look for consistencies or contradictions across the various focus groups and make better assessments of the significance of issues.

Level 3 Analysis: Interpretive Meaning

This final interpretive analysis involved examination of the edited sub-theme videotapes by the entire research team, referring to the original master tapes when necessary to get a fuller sense of the context of statements. Videotapes were reviewed to note the participants' accounts of issues

related to violence as influenced by social, environmental and personal factors. (See Attachment E for the Coding Schemes Analyses.) Reviewers noted the sequence of events that contributed to these various accounts, while considering additional factors such as lifestyles, values and worldview, along with adult, media and environmental influences.

Key Findings

Violence is an important issue, and is on the minds of many Philadelphians. Most residents MEE spoke to are acutely aware of how critical the situation is, trying to survive in neighborhoods riddled by violence. For many, violence visits their lives daily and on a very personal basis. It has the potential to impact every neighborhood. The streets have become a particularly hazardous place for our young people.

Handguns are easy to come by and are often used to settle disputes both big and small. No perceived “insult” goes unanswered among some youth — and the response is often violent. The combination of easy accessibility to guns and few, if any conflict-resolutions skills, has in some aspects created a “perfect storm” of street violence in Philadelphia. In other words, arguments and disputes that were once settled with fists are now being decided by a bullet.

Many participants say they don’t feel safe in their neighborhoods or even in their own homes. As one male explained, *“A stray bullet can come from anywhere.”* ***Yet, many feel overwhelmed by the issue and don’t know where to begin to try to change things.***

People have ideas about who is responsible for violence in this city and about who’s responsible for fixing it. In many cases, groups point finger at others. Adults blame youth..., young people blame non-caring adults..., and “good” parents blame “bad” parents. Some adults blame the media — particularly violent-laden rap music, video games and the news media. Yet, across groups, individuals in Philadelphia seem to be divided with regard to the issue of violence and how to solve it.

There are also mixed opinions on the causes of the violence. Many suggest that violent incidents often occur over “something stupid,” while issues of poverty, respect, power and control and low self-esteem also play a part. Drugs and disputes over drugs are also cited. Some adults believe that violent children are only acting out what they see at home on a regular basis.

Opinions were mixed about whether there are enough effective organizations in the neighborhoods to support violence prevention. Some Philadelphians believe that there *are* programs and activities in which youth can participate. Those who are in good programs have good things to say. Yet others feel that such programs are either not promoted or held within a reasonable distance from their homes. They say what good is an intervention program if not enough people know about it?

What are the options for our city? Youth believe they have an almost non-existent support system of adults in their lives. An inadequate infrastructure of schools and service organizations leaves them with limited options. They live in a community with limited messages of recovery for those who have “fallen” and limited access to meaningful assistance.

Yet many Philadelphians say that they would welcome help if it were available. That provides a ray of hope. People in these communities recognize that there is a need for change. At least some are willing to move beyond the “blame game” and begin to move toward solutions that work.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Violence in Philadelphia

Many Philadelphians say they witness violence every day. They cited in detail the violence that impacts their lives. The most common types of violence they witness are related to guns, drugs, interpersonal conflicts that result in fights, gang violence and even clashes involving entire neighborhoods. *“I see violence three or four times a week.” (Secondary Teen female)* *“You always see somebody getting shot or ‘rolled on.’” (Secondary Latino teen)* *“At school, I see violence every day.” (AA Teen female)* Few, if any, neighborhoods are immune. *“[There’s violence] in Olney, Germantown and North Philly practically every day!” (AA parent)* Many residents also mentioned that they see violence in many places. *“[I see violence] every day on TV, on the streets, looking out the window.” (Secondary Latino male)*

Some of the participants described themselves as being victims of violence, while others admitted to being actual perpetrators of violence in their communities. *“I’ve been robbed at gun point, pistol whipped...” (Tertiary AA male)* *“My ole head pistol-whipped the boy.” (Secondary AA male)* *“I was with some friends of mine, we seen someone late at night... He come out of the barbershop, we ran up on him.” (Secondary AA male)*

Youth mentioned that they have been victims of crimes ranging from being robbed of personal possessions (e.g., shoes, clothing) to being “rolled on.” *“It was late at night... he walked up on me... asked what size I wore... pulled out a gun... my sneaks was gone. And my brother actually got stripped naked one time (in a robbery).”* They added that because there was no immediate assistance available for them as victims of a crime, they ended up taking matters into their own hands. *“I was mad and went back and got my ‘homies’ to go fight them back.” “I got my ‘old head’ and we went back and handled it, basically.”* Others just chose to let it go. *“I was mad, but I just kept that inside.” (Tertiary AA males)* Another former crime victim has now become a perpetrator and no longer fears violence in his community. *“I don’t fear the neighborhood, because I’m not a victim anymore. I became part of the [violence] problem, so I don’t have no fear.” (Tertiary AA male)*

Violence involving females is perceived as on the rise. *“Last night there was a group of girls fighting,”* reported one African American teen female. Another relayed an incident in which *“Me and my sister kind of jumped this girl and got suspended from school.”* Participants described female gang members that behave aggressively, and act similar to males. *“At Live 8 [a concert], there was like ten of them all together, and they were just pushing past everybody and nobody would say anything to them.”* Participants also said, however, that when females are involved in conflict, they tend to fight without weapons. *Girls have more feelings than guys. They would probably want to hurt [another girl], not kill them.” (AA Teen female)* If a weapon is involved, it would usually be a knife, mace, pepper spray or “whatever is around at the time.”

Violence is sometimes related to petty issues. *“Last week somebody got shot over nothin’... over a bike.” (Tertiary AA male)* *“Two weeks ago, a guy got shot in a bar over an argument over a girl.” (Secondary Latino male)* *“I seen a bull get shot for having the same outfit on as a bull.” (Tertiary AA male)* Although some of these events may start off with just two people

in conflict, they can escalate out of control when entire families, or even neighborhoods, join in the defense or retaliation. *“First, it will start out with just two people, and then the whole family will get into it. They are crazy around my [neighborhood].” (AA Teen female)*

Gun Violence

Philadelphians believe that they have easy access to guns. Participants across all groups say that guns are easy to access in their communities; many said that they even personally know many individuals who own guns. Others mentioned that there are even stores in the community where guns are easily purchased. *“[Guns are as easy to get] as burned CDs.” (Service Provider)* *“My uncle owns a gun and keeps it in his room.” (Secondary Teen female)* With one simple phone call, many of the youth say they are able to obtain a gun, sometimes even if they have no money to pay for it. *“[Guns are] very accessible. That’s not nothing hard to get. If they know the right person...it’s obtainable.” (Parent)* *“[It’s] easy to get guns with just a phone call.” (Tertiary AA male)*

Gun violence is common in many Philadelphia neighborhoods. Participants say it is quite common to witness or hear gun violence in their neighborhoods every day. *“The fact that kids go to sleep with the crack of gunfire is a standard operating procedure...it’s how they live.” (Service Provider)* An African American male said he knew of someone who was shot *“about 10 times, but he’s still alive.”* One service provider added that she worries that, over time, youth will somehow accept the violence in their community as the norm. *“[My fear] is that they’ll accept this as reality — that this is how we are supposed to live.”*

Gun ownership is believed to “level the playing field” in situations where power and control is at issue. This is especially true for those who may believe they are physically unable to fight their enemies. *“If me and him got a conflict and I’m bigger than him, he not gonna say too much. But if he got a gun, he gonna say we one (on the same level).” (Tertiary AA male)* *“Guns make them feel like a bigger man. Punk dudes that don’t know how to fight [carry guns].” (Tertiary AA male)* *“Guns are about power and control.” (Primary AA parent)* *“People that got guns get that ‘power thing.’” (Tertiary AA male)* Males suggested that youth sometimes believe that they need guns because they know someone is going to attempt to get revenge on them for something.

Respect

Philadelphians believe that violence is related to feelings of low self-esteem among youth and their desire for respect. *“Youth violence is about power, money and respect.” (Tertiary AA male)* *“Half of the violence is about pride and getting your name out there.” (Tertiary AA male)* Young people suggested that a solution to the violence in their communities is to boost self-esteem. *“The people who fight are the people with low self-esteem. That person needs to talk to someone. There’s some anger within.” (Secondary Teen female)* *“They fought my daughter because she has long hair. That’s low self-esteem.” (Primary AA parent)*

Male participants in particular believe that much of violence is due to a strong need for respect in the community. *“Your respect is everything. If you lose it, you lose control.” (Tertiary AA male)*

“Some use the gun to get respect.” (Tertiary AA male) Males add that some youth who were even “nerds” at younger ages, now walk with pride because they have been involved in violence. “You see someone who was a nerd in elementary school and now he’s got two bodies [has killed two people].” (Tertiary AA male)

Teens, especially females, said that violence among their peers is due to people being jealous of one another, and their need to “show-off” in front of their peers. *“A lot of girls start stuff because they are with a group of people. But if they were by themselves they wouldn’t say anything.” “Girls always want to fight you. They might like your man, they might like your clothes.” “You can’t hang out with girls too long.” (Secondary Teen female) One teen said that “[A girl] wanted to fight me because she didn’t like my best friend, Jasmine.” Males also mentioned jealousy over possessions as a cause for violence. “You can have ‘kicks’ on or a fresh white tee on and they’ll hate you. If you have something better than somebody, they are quick to jump on you.” (Secondary Latino male)*

Parental Influence

Many adults are not serving as good role models for their children. Some adults believe that violent youth are reflecting what they have seen and heard in their homes and communities. *“It’s what they are exposed to at home. Violence is the accepted mode of communication in their environments.” (Service Provider) “If I, as an adult, don’t make good choices, how can I expect a child to do so?” (Primary AA parent) “We [as parents] say one thing and then portray something different.” (Primary AA parent)*

Many youth feel that the parents in their community fail to help youth avoid violence. In fact, they say, some of the parents even encourage youth to engage in violence as a way of resolving differences. *“Nobody gives good advice any more. There’s always a piece of violence in [their] advice. [They’ll say] ‘I think you should take care of that problem.’ What do they mean by that!?” (Secondary Latino male) One teen female even believes that adults influence their daughters to dislike their peers. “My Mom would say, ‘I just don’t like that lady across the street.’ But she won’t have a reason.”*

Both youth and the adult participants say that parents are not listening to youth or spending enough time with their children. *“My uncle is never home with my cousins. They stay home by themselves all the time.” (Secondary Teen female) “Parents are too busy.” (Primary AA parent) “Parents don’t take the time out to talk to their children. That’s what makes the kids go out and do what they do.” (Secondary Teen female) This lack of adult involvement is a powerful factor in the lives of Philadelphia youth.*

Violence is exacerbated by poverty and the fact that single parents head the vast majority of low-income households. The extended family is often left to attempt to fill in the gaps. *“Kids need to act their age, but they are told at a young age that they are responsible for even younger kids.” (Service Provider) Or as one parent said: “Parents are putting too much responsibility on their kids right now...the [youth] are out there trying to get money for the family.” Many youth reported having no relationship with their fathers or with male figures. “My father left me when I was young boy.” (Secondary Latino male)*

Parents are perceived as not caring about or afraid of youth. Some parents, youth say, are apathetic, and are sometimes even afraid to intervene in youth violence. *“You see a lot of people not saying anything. They’re turning the other way, because they’re afraid of the kids!”* (Primary AA parent) *“[These parents] watched their son get jumped in front of their house, and they didn’t do anything.”* (Secondary Latino male) *“My pop doesn’t encourage me to do nothing. He doesn’t care.”* (Secondary Latino male)

Parenting skills could be improved. *“Parents need to know when to be a friend and when to be a parent.”* (Primary AA parent) *“Parents are trying to be friends [with youth]. In my house, you’re gonna get constructive guidance.”* (Primary AA parent) Parents, some said, should provide a foundation for their children to prevent them from making bad choices. *“[If you provide the right foundation] children may go astray and make bad choices, but it won’t be consistently bad choices.”* (Primary AA parent)

Non-Parental/Community Influence: Where is the Village?

Many Philadelphians feel that the community of adults has failed its youth. Overall, participants believe that there are poor adult role models in their communities. *“It’s the community together [that’s responsible for the violence], the schools, the churches...”* (Primary AA parent) *“The kids are acting out from our lack of responsibility. We are the problem.”* (Service Provider)

While some community members are said to be great with the youth, i.e., *“Everybody on the block congregates at my house.”* (Primary AA parent), others are said to be poor examples and offer nothing to youth. Many Philadelphians do not go out of their way to be in the lives of youth. *“We as adults don’t make ourselves available. [We say to ourselves] a bad kid is someone else’s problem, not my problem.”* (Service Provider) *“If you know you’re the older person and see somebody doing something wrong, say something about it. The [adults] just don’t care.”* (Secondary Teen female) *“[Adults] on my block, they’re not trying to help. If they see a fight, they’ll call the cops in a heartbeat, but they ain’t gonna give you no advice.”* (Secondary Teen female)

A constant theme in the youth focus groups was the lack of positive adults in their lives. Youth understand that there is a vacuum that is not being filled by the adults in their lives, especially at home. Youth say few adults are giving them encouragement, direction or help. Young people say that their neighbors are nosy, and offer no assistance or advice to youth. *“Everybody on my block is nosy. They won’t help you or give you no advice.”* (Secondary Teen female) Most said that they need caring adults to push them more (i.e., to stay in school), to talk to them more and to be better role models in the community. Many feel powerless to deal with the reality of this neglect.

Service providers said that they also see youth becoming more violent due to anger and lack of attention from adults. *“They are seeking attention...trying to fill that void.”* *“A lot of the young men are angry because the dad is not in their lives for one reason or another. They don’t know*

how to take that anger and channel it into something positive.” “They feel hopeless with no future.” (Service Providers)

Many adults were eager to blame the media — both for fueling violence and for only reporting negative incidents in poor communities. *“[The youth] don’t understand the consequences of doing wrong. [Violence] looks glamorous on TV, and [those arrested go free] on TV. But [in real life] youth are not [being released] and they’re getting a lot of [prison] time.” (Service Provider) “You have [the rap star] 50 Cents saying he’s a drop out, and making more than the teachers! If he’s a drop out and making more than my teacher, then what am I listening to you for?” (Tertiary AA male) “The media promotes this as if everybody is violent — they don’t reflect the positive things kids are doing.” (Service Provider)*

Neighborhood transience contributes to a lack of strong leadership and support for youth. As one local service provider described it, *“Our community has changed...people are moving in and out, and now there’s no connection [between residents].” “Neighborhoods used to be stable, families lived there, kids stayed there. So everybody used to know each other. Now you got people coming in, leaving out, coming in, leaving out, so you don’t know the person next door, so you don’t really care about them...” (Tertiary AA male)*

The faith community is perceived as not participating in tough community issues at a grassroots level. *“The faith-based community is not doing what it’s supposed to do.” (Service Provider) Youth also say that the church is no longer present in the community and that pastors are even afraid to come out. “Pastors don’t come out any more to take the neighborhood back.” (Tertiary AA male) “They [Preachers] don’t take you out like... let me take you and your homies and lets go play ball, ...they don’t do that” (Tertiary AA male)*

Many in the community do not see teachers and law enforcement as supportive. In addition, the police, too, are often not the trusted adults whom youth can turn to when needed. *“Some of those cops be dirty. I don’t trust them.” (Secondary Latino) “Cops just come out to be nosy. They just come out because they have to.” (Primary AA parent) Also, both youth and adult participants state that the teachers are not interested in teaching anymore and fail to assist students in school. One participant even remarked that teachers are not doing a good job of detecting youth who cannot read. “Teachers need to pick up on kids who can’t read.” (Tertiary AA male)*

In the absence of a strong parental presence, older peers are now a strong influence in the lives of youth. Missing fathers and little male involvement were often cited as realities for Philadelphia youth. Along with single parents who are struggling to make ends meet, this creates a vacuum in the development process of youth. When adults are not around or involved youth look to others for answers or support. In many cases, this turns out to be an older male peer. *“The gang on the corner who no one is listening to or looking after will come along and take your child’s life.” (Service Provider) Many youth said that they look up to their “ole heads” (some that are even drug dealers), who give them good advice and watch out for them. “The little kid sees them making money selling drugs and want to be that.” (Secondary AA male) “You can be friends with someone who is 20 years older than you.” (Tertiary AA male) “I go to*

my old head because he knows what he's talking about. They don't want to see you on the corner, they want to see you doing something with your life." (Secondary AA male)

Education/Schools

Parents, service providers and youth all contend that the school system is failing Philadelphia children. They mentioned inadequate teachers, ongoing safety issues and a dilapidated infrastructure that renders the school environment non-conducive for learning. *"I would go to school and fall asleep in class. The teachers don't care." (Secondary Latino male)* *"The school is run down..."* *"The school district [is] shutting down schools...why?" (Secondary Latino male)* *"Teachers don't care about you, they're just getting a paycheck." (Tertiary AA male)*

Many youth and young adults mentioned a lack of safety in school. *"My [high] school was just like being in the streets." (Tertiary AA male)* *"My school was basically like the Badlands." (Secondary AA male)* *"It's not safe in school these days...people getting rolled on, heads smashed into lockers." (Secondary AA male)*

Older youth who had dropped out of school and become involved in violence now wish they had focused more on education. Although many of the male youth said they had either been kicked out or dropped out of school, most were making efforts to pursue their education through GED programs. *"My mother, my father, my PO and my advocate are encouraging me to stay in school." (Secondary Latino male)*

Key Recommendations

STRATEGIES TOWARD A SAFER PHILADELPHIA

Developing effective solutions and strategies to reduce violence in Philadelphia and help its youngest generation achieve the happiness they seek will require a multi-faceted approach that encompasses many segments of society. These elements should all support the ongoing delivery of messages about violence prevention. Our overall goal is to provide our youth with viable alternatives to violence that reflect the realities of their lives. By focusing on today's hip-hop generation, we can begin to break the cycles that contribute to disintegrating urban communities.

Ultimately, even low-income youth want the same things that mainstream adults do. They want someone who's "got their back" and who will be there when they need them. The question is how do we help them get it? Our collective responsibility is to help Philadelphia youth make choices that improve their chances growing up in a safer environment and of leading healthy, productive lives.

As experienced communicators often targeting the hardest-to-reach audiences, MEE has sought to explore ways in this project to "expand the toolbox" in order to effectively use social marketing to reduce youth violence. This report includes media-focused solutions, non-traditional strategies and broader, often long-term recommendations. Many of these recommendations were offered by experts in the field such as Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Dr. Carl C. Bell, Youth Violence – A Report of the Surgeon General (2001), and MEE's public health experience within the oral communication culture and the focus group participants themselves.

What is important is that there is a role that each segment of the Philadelphia community can play in addressing the issues raised in this research. It will require a partnership that embraces various perspectives and points of view, while maintaining focus on a common goal. Whether one represents the media, the education system, faith-based institutions, the criminal justice system, or whether one's community-based organization's focus is on prevention or intervention — or both — there are positive, concrete steps that can be taken throughout this city (using media, peers and adults...). The strategies also include steps that individuals who have close contact with youth — parents and other caregivers, the extended family, teachers and others — can take to improve communication with and provide meaningful support to them. In particular, there is a special and increasingly important place for men to get involved, especially older male peers, fathers and other influential adult male figures. Knowledge of this need comes from MEE's experience within the African American community and the feedback of the focus group participants themselves.

In many scenarios, meaningful and lasting behavior change requires both short- and long-term strategies. Some of these suggestions can be implemented immediately; others will require additional study and funding, along with a community-wide commitment and dedication to repair our frayed social fabric. We hope that these recommendations — both short- and long-term — will lead to empowering Philadelphians to take back this community from violence and

create an environment that supports our youth in making positive, healthy choices about their lives and their futures.

Moving toward a Safer Philadelphia can begin right away, but it will not be accomplished overnight. Systemic change must also occur, in a number of sectors, in order to make this vision a reality.

A SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

MEE is prepared to develop and implement a unique social marketing campaign that would motivate and engage Philadelphians to examine and change some of their attitudes and behaviors around violence. The time is right to implement an audience/community-driven campaign that addresses three target audiences: the broader Philadelphia community, (adults, volunteers, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, after-school programs, schools and more); parents/caregivers; and youth and young adults with a goal of raising public awareness of the importance of preventing violence in this city.

A variety of stakeholders would be enlisted in the effort to change the messages we send to young people about their treatment of, and interactions with, each other. The goal would be to create a new “safety net” of concerned and involved adults — volunteers, mentors, young adult professionals, **older male peers from the community**, parents and other family members, ministers, coaches, teachers, and more — who could help improve communication with young people about some of the complex issues that impact their decision-making around violence.

The campaign would also encourage Philadelphia adults to network with and talk to each other about these issues — sharing both the frustrations and successful strategies they have encountered in dealing with violence prevention. The entire community must become engaged, energized and empowered in order to successfully support this depth of change. In this section, we outline both the content (i.e., what to say) and media delivery channels (i.e., how to say it) for such a comprehensive, integrated campaign.

When designing a communications campaign, you cannot underestimate the importance of “*what to say*” and “*how to say it.*” Both of these elements must be carefully thought out to reflect the daily realities of these often under-served and misunderstood markets.

The core elements of the social marketing campaign design will be based on:

Oral Communications Culture

The channel choices for this campaign are built upon an understanding of the communications culture of the target audiences. What distinguishes these audiences (especially African Americans) from the mainstream is reliance on an oral communications structure. African Americans and Latinos have distinct communications styles and interpret messages based on their own worldview, which often differs considerably from the mainstream. This unique communications dynamic cannot be overlooked in devising a successful campaign strategy. (*See Attachment F for a more detailed discussion of Oral Communications Culture.*)

Core Messages

During the focus group research phase of this project, MEE learned from the target audiences that an effective message should “keep it real” and give Philadelphians specific examples of what individuals can do to make the city safer. Often, public information campaigns provide only a prevention message, which tells an individual to “do this” or “stop that.” However, we believe that this campaign will be viewed as more credible, authentic and truly “meeting people where they are” when messages are created in several categories. Presenting prevention, retention (“keep on doing the right thing”) and recovery (“you can change your life and make another choice”) messages together will simultaneously meet the needs of the target audiences and Blueprint campaign partners.

Fundamentally there is not a single, narrow message and method that will reach all the targets. Instead, this project requires a variety of messages, media and communication formats, creating a variety of intervention campaign components that all make up the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia. Following are our recommendations based upon the focus groups.

KEY MESSAGE CONTENT: “WHAT TO SAY”

Philadelphians want real messages, featuring real people who look and sound like them, and depicting their daily realities of being exposed to violence. They do not want sugar-coated messages or messages which point the finger, but they *do* want skills- and knowledge-building messages and conflict-resolution strategies that reflect the tough issues with which they are dealing.

An Overarching Message: Promote Education

Philadelphians across groups seem to agree that promoting education is a key to preventing violence. Many saw a link between a lack of education and few options or opportunities that make violence more likely. For example, participants gave several accounts of youth who are unable to read and who, in an effort to cope, often act out in school or even stopping showing up – leaving them with time on their hands and the opportunity to get into trouble. “*If Johnny can’t read then he will act up in school.*” (Tertiary AA male) “*A lot of kids can’t read so they’ll act up. They’ll leave in the morning like they are going to school and never make it.*” (Tertiary AA male)

To prevent violence, youth recommend that older youth persevere in getting their education, and that younger youth should be engaged around education from an earlier age. “*Without education you really don’t have a lot of options in life.*” “[*If*] *You don’t want to be broke, get an education.*” (Tertiary AA males) “*Be stronger on education when youth are in elementary school.*” (Secondary Latino males) “*Get an education and you won’t have to work as hard.*” (Tertiary AA male) They also believe that it is necessary to infuse the message of education to youth consistently for it to be effective. “*If you’ve got somebody in your ear telling you you’re gonna make money if you finish school, you’re gonna believe it.*” (Secondary AA male) Youth also suggested peer-to-peer mentoring as an education-promotion strategy.

Participants also mentioned that Philadelphians must help youth see that being smart is not something that one should hide or be ashamed of. As one school administrator described, “*We had a young lady who tutored someone in chemistry and calculus and was ashamed to tell anyone.*” Another provider suggested that the city needs stronger educational programs — after-school tutoring and mentoring — in order to help youth achieve in school.

Violence Prevention Messages to Teens

Many youth believe that a good message for their peers would be one that focuses on the negative consequences of violence. “*Focus on the consequences [of violence].*” (Secondary AA Teen female) They should also be told that violence is a waste of time, and that it can negatively impact their future, leaving them at a dead end, literally. The follow up to that message, one young man suggested, is this message: “*The only difference between you and them (people who fell victim to violence) is that you have a chance to change your life.*” (Secondary AA male)

In addition to showing consequences, messages should also promote positive alternatives for youth who do not engage in violence. “*Focus on the good results of not engaging in violence and not [just] the bad consequences of doing violence.*” (Secondary Latino male) “*You can get the [bling bling] but it’s a process. Show the good (consequences).*” (Secondary AA male) “*All the programs tell you the same thing [negative consequences] and no one is listening.*” (Secondary Latino male) “*[I would tell someone] you have a future and you’re better than this.*” (Secondary Teen female) Youth in one Philadelphia program, “Don’t Fall Down in the Hood,” say the City should consider replicating its model. “*This program sends kids on trips and exposes them. You can’t just tell them it’s good out there; you have to show them.*” “*This program gives you opportunities. I meet successful people every day and it gives me so many ways to get mentored.*” (Secondary AA males)

Youth should be encouraged to forge their own path in life. Several young people mentioned that their peers should be encouraged to be themselves and avoid bad leadership. “*Use your own opinion. Stop listening to other people. There’s only one voice you want to follow and that’s the good one.*” They also suggest warning youth about their urge to make money at a young age. “*Everything is a process. It’s a misconception when kids see 50 [Cent, a rapper] on the video. You can get [the expensive stuff], but it’s a process.*” (Secondary AA male)

Youth need to know that there are adults in Philadelphia who are concerned about their safety and their future. “*[We need to let youth] see that we as adults and caregivers really do care, because they are not getting that.*” (Service Provider)

Messages should be real and relate to youth’s everyday experiences. Youth warn that corny slogans and unrealistic messages will turn youth off. Instead, “*[Tell them that] at age 15 you’re supposed to be broke. You ain’t got no bills and your mom is taking care of you. You don’t have to worry about money [now].*” (Secondary AA male)

Violence Prevention Messages to Parents

Parents need to be reminded of their importance as role models for their children. Adult participants believe that the youth are watching everything that adults do, not what they say. *“Kids are watching everything that you do.” (Service Provider)* They say that not only do parents fail to communicate with youth, but that they are also poor role models and even instigate youth to engage in violence. *“Parents need to look at themselves in the mirror. If I don’t have no values how can I teach you?” (Primary AA parent)* *“It starts at home. You can’t say anything that will change youth.” (Tertiary AA male)* *“Tell these young people what’s right and what’s wrong, and show them.” (Tertiary AA male)* Overall, parents and adults in general need to set better examples. *“Model the behavior. Young people can see through the B.S.”*

Parents should listen to and get more involved in the lives of their children. Their failure to get involved is causing youth to act out and engage even more in violent episodes that may even take their life. *“To lose a child is the worst thing in the world. If you don’t get involved in your child’s life you could possibly lose your child.” (Service Provider)* *“That’s a lot of what’s wrong with kids — no one’s listening to them.” (Tertiary AA male)* Parents can help prevent violence by improving the self-esteem of their child. *“If parents show children that they are loved, then they will have what it takes to [avoid] violence. A lot of children are hurting and don’t feel like they are worth anything.” (Primary AA parent)*

Violence Prevention Messages to the Broader Adult Community

Adults are both the problem and solution in preventing violence in Philadelphia. Participants believe it will be important to highlight the fact that adults, particularly parents, are to blame for the violence in Philadelphia. *“We as adults are responsible.” (Service Provider)* *“If you don’t have a positive impact on the youth of today, it means that they won’t be good citizens.” (Service Provider)* *“We as adults have failed our children and society’s children.” (Primary AA parent)* *“...If we don’t have a positive impact, youth cannot achieve the American...dream.” (Service Provider)*

Participants suggested that adults become more involved with *all* youth in their community (not just their own) and be less fearful of correcting and communicating with youth. *“Get involved and teach values.”* *“Stop acting like you don’t see things!”*

Philadelphia needs a stronger presence of positive role models in the community, particularly males. *“If a [man in the community] is not sweeping his yard...walking old ladies across the street, forget him.” (Service Provider)* *“[A man] could just adopt a street...interacting with young brothas goes a long way.” (Service Provider)* *“Let them know that they can come to us... and be open.” (Primary AA parent)*

Community residents from all over the city must get involved in preventing violence. Residents are failing to get involved and intervene in youth violence, especially when it involves youth other than their own children. *“We need more concerned parents and neighbors that aren’t afraid to say ‘stop doing that.’” (Primary AA parent)* *“It’s just not about you, it’s about*

generations.” “[Youth] are watching you and you don’t care. So why should they?” (Service Provider)

“HOW TO SAY IT:” PROMOTIONAL CHANNELS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION MESSAGES

In order to be successful in delivering violence prevention messages in Philadelphia, one must use media channels that are most effective and ensure that the delivery style reflects the oral-based communications culture of the majority of the “receivers.” In this section, we examine how a variety of media and outreach channels could be leveraged in reaching out to the city, including which message senders would have the most authenticity and credibility.

Youth participants liked the idea of using **sponsored block parties, ads in hip hop magazines, PSAs and youth-oriented radio talk shows** to convey the message of violence prevention in Philadelphia. “Everybody will be chillin’ [at the block party] and you won’t have to worry about no beef.” (Secondary Latino male) “Block parties bring a lot of people out. That’s the non-violence right there.” (Secondary AA males) “All the youth read hip hop magazines.” (Secondary AA males) “[A radio talk show hosted by youth] will try to get a conversation going with everybody.” (Secondary Latino male)

Parents and service providers also suggested using radio ads and TV PSAs. They suggested putting violence prevention messages on TV and radio because Philadelphians are watching and listening every day and the messages may sink in. Because of its high penetration and wide audience, these channels work well as one component of a social marketing campaign.

Engage the media or use the “inner city grapevine” to tell the other side of the story. Many adults suggested that the local media could play a more positive and active role in stopping the violence. “They constantly focus on the negative.” “We have to make the media more responsible.” (Service Providers)

OTHER CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

Developing a Corps of Youth Leaders

We can look right inside the youth peer group to find the answers to violence prevention in Philadelphia. Youth say they want information from people whose reality mirrors their own. Most youth freely admit the power of peer pressure in their lives. Yet peer pressure can, when leveraged wisely, have a positive instead of a negative effect on youth decision-making. Because youth are spending so much of their time in the company of their peers, creating messages that can be shared within the peer group setting is important. An effective social marketing strategy must include educating and empowering peers to be purveyors of violence prevention messages.

What are sometimes called “older, near peers” also have an important role to play. This group comprises slightly older individuals who have recently cleared the adolescent experience. Many of the “old-heads” said that they have already taken it upon themselves to advise their younger counterparts, since no one advised *them*. This concept could have powerful ramifications and be an effective model for actually getting younger youth to listen and adhere to advice on avoiding

violence and making positive choices. Support groups (led by near peers or older-peer mentors) in which youth could come together in a safe setting and openly discuss their concerns should be considered for implementation.

Peer messages would need to be shared in a variety of settings and ways. Key would be to expose youth to positive messages in a way that does not turn them off or make them feel lectured. Peer-moderated discussion groups, led by young men and women who espouse positive values and model positive behavior, can give youth the opportunity to explore various life choices in a non-confrontational, supportive setting that allows them to see that not all young people resort to violence in order to resolve conflict. These peer group leaders/educators can begin to establish norms that others will be inclined to follow, once these leaders (who would receive comprehensive training) show that they can be respectful and focused on life goals, while still earning and maintaining the respect of their peers. This way, a new set of norms of behavior among Philadelphia youth are created and enforced.

Supporting and Enabling Philadelphia Parents

Many Philadelphians believe that violence should begin in the home with the parents. In order to be helpful to their children as they navigate the tricky waters of adolescence, parents, guardians and caring adults have to first take stock of their own behaviors. Many are struggling to deal with their own present and past issues related to violence. An infrastructure must be put in place to provide the support to help parents deal with their own issues, to communicate more effectively with their children about violence, and to provide help to parents whose children may be at-risk.

These options include sponsoring parent workshops, support groups and community forums where parents can bond with other caregivers, share the joys and pains of raising a hip-hop adolescent, and learn some proven strategies for improving communication and relating. Support networks can be important for parents who feel isolated in dealing with the challenges and stresses in their lives, and the lives of their children.

Improving Education/Schools

Schools could be more supportive in preventing violence among youth. *“The school is not a very nice place for young people...it’s not supportive, it’s not nurturing.” (Service Provider) “If we had a public school system that was nurturing, with teachers that cared, that would make a difference.” (Service Provider)* Dr. Carl Bell cited that “school connectedness is definitely a protective factor for violence prevention.” (Bearinger et al, 2005, Resnick, et al, 1997).

Improving Program Delivery

Existing effective and culturally-relevant programs need to be promoted better to attract more youth. Clearly, Philadelphians are not taking full advantage of available violence prevention and intervention programs. *“It’s a lot of services out there, it’s just people got to get into them...” (Secondary teen female) “If you showing that real side, I can tell my neighborhood straight up: Yo, that program hot! Look what it did for me.” (Secondary AA male) “If*

Philadelphia had a lot more programs like that, ...you'd see a lot more people that change.”
(Secondary AA male)

Participating in such programs is one way that youth say they increase their chances of staying safe. They avoid violence by staying to themselves, staying busy with sports or other programs or consistently “hanging around” with the same group of friends. Dr. Carl Bell stated that research suggests that social skills are protective against violence and mentoring can provide adult protective shield by monitoring youth behavior. (Flay et al, 2004)

Engaging the Village

Make adults aware of the lack of strong adult role models in the community and engage them to get involved. The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Campaign should focus on first involving the people who can make a difference in making Philadelphia a safer city. Then it must motivate and inspire them to “get with the program.” To do so, it is essential to create a process of involving entities that come in most frequent contact with youth and young adults. Organizations that should be included in the campaign should deal with both primary and secondary prevention¹ and include:

- After-school and summer school programs
- Drop-in education programs (including tutoring)
- Violence prevention programs
- Athletic and sports programs
- GED programs/job readiness programs
- Counseling/mental health centers
- Victims assistance programs
- Parenting classes, including Fatherhood Initiatives

Create youth entrepreneurship and mentoring programs. Many adults believed that mentoring programs could be very successful in Philadelphia. *“The mentoring programs are the most effective.”* (Primary AA parent) A strategy to help many youth out of their current situation is to promote entrepreneurship so that young people can make a life for themselves, without resorting to violence.

Just about all young people in the focus groups were into “getting paid.” Yet they were often unaware of the micro-steps of how to make it happen. Young people often complain about the low wages and unfulfilling work associated with fast food and other entry-level jobs. Few have been exposed to the idea of owning their own business. They do not know how to take what they already know or what they like to do and turn it into a legal, moneymaking enterprise that will help support their dreams and aspirations.

If we can show young people an alternative to the street life, one that will take him or her into “middle age” and help them support themselves and their families, it can provide a goal that will

¹ **Primary Prevention** interventions refer to activities and strategies that promote health and safety “upfront” for all members of a community. **Secondary Prevention** interventions are for youth described as “in the thick.” **Tertiary Prevention** represents activities that take place “after the fact” or in the aftermath of a violent tragedy.

keep youth focused on “doing the right thing.” Self-development gives youth goals and constructive activities. With an entrepreneurial venture to focus on, they have something else to do with their time than get involved in situations that can lead to violence. Motivating more youth to become entrepreneurs has the added benefit of supporting economic development in their own, often financially hard-hit, communities.