

# Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center



YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTERS



*“If we take care of abandoned, empty lots in our cities, clean them up and create space for positive social interaction, we can help create safer and busier streets.”*

— Marc Zimmerman, MI-YVPC

## THE TOLL OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

Youth violence is a serious public health problem. Homicide is a leading cause of death for youth aged 10–24 years. Each day, about 13 youth die from homicide and more than 1,300 are treated in emergency departments for nonfatal injuries. Youth violence has lasting harmful effects on young people, their families, and their communities. Research by CDC’s National Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (YVPCs) shows prevention is possible. In

communities that are experiencing some of the nation’s highest rates of youth violence, YVPCs are:

- Partnering with community organizations, schools, law enforcement and other community stakeholders with the common goal of reducing youth violence
- Rigorously evaluating prevention strategies
- Working to ensure effective strategies can be adapted and used in other communities

## THE MISSION

The Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC) brought together researchers, community representatives, practitioners, and policy makers to reduce youth violence in high-risk communities in Flint, MI for almost two decades. These collaborations resulted in reductions in youth violence and promoted



the healthy and safe development of youth and families in schools and neighborhoods. An evaluation of a comprehensive set of six preventive strategies implemented in Flint found that youth in the intervention community were significantly less likely to be a victim of a violent assault than those living in other communities. The comprehensive program also resulted in a significant decrease in overall number of expected assault-related injuries per month relative to youth in a comparison community.

## THE COMMUNITY — REACHING BEYOND FLINT

In 2015, MI-YVPC also started working with community partners in Youngstown, OH, and Camden, NJ. The three cities (Flint, Youngstown and Camden) have rates of youth violence exceeding the national average, are comparable demographically, and have many vacant and run-down properties. Once wealthy each city has experienced industrial decline and subsequent high levels of unemployment and population loss. All three now rank below the U.S. average on most socioeconomic indicators and above the U.S. average on violent crime.

## PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE

The current work of the MI-YVPC is guided by a collaboration among the University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, Rutgers University, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Center for Community Progress, land banks, economic development organizations, health departments, hospitals, police

departments and community-based organizations in each city. To prevent youth violence, these partners are improving vacant properties and evaluating for positive effects on youth violence, property crimes, and violence-related injuries. Turning shabby properties into usable spaces for positive social interaction and subsequently reducing youth violence is consistent with principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and is often referred to as “greening.”

## EVALUATING IMPACT

Using a CPTED and greening framework, the MI-YVPC and its partners will test different approaches to property maintenance to evaluate their impact on youth violence. They will compare a community and youth-engaged approach to maintaining and improving vacant properties to maintenance done by professional maintenance organizations. They will examine community change associated with these different approaches relative to vacant lots receiving no intervention. Knowledge gained from this research will further inform local solutions on how to prevent youth violence in other communities across the country. The MI-YVPC will:

- Assess the impact of different approaches to property maintenance on changes to the physical environment and community-level youth crime and violence.
- Identify the community readiness and capacity needed to implement a successful greening program and document the implementation process.
- Use research findings and lessons learned from over 100 communities implementing greening programs to develop and disseminate an implementation guide.



**U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services**  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

**Marc Zimmerman, PhD**  
Principal Investigator  
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor  
[michiganyvpc@umich.edu](mailto:michiganyvpc@umich.edu)  
<http://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/>