

# Worcester Youth Violence Prevention & Reduction Strategic Plan: Goals & Strategies



Mattering Relationships  
Safety Positive  
Youth Community Healing  
Race Gender Family Structure  
Opportunities Support  
Skills Social Efficacy Resources

Completed for Worcester Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative  
By Clark University May 2014 (updated October 2014)



## Executive Summary from the Needs and Resources Analysis Report

Most young people in Worcester are healthy, productive, and contribute to their community. They are on a path toward a secure and successful adulthood. However, there is a subset of young people—disproportionately Black and Latino males living in the city’s most distressed neighborhoods—who enter a cycle of violence at an extremely early age. Our aim with this report is to provide Worcester residents and decision-makers with data and frameworks that will help the community prioritize areas for action and identify solutions to reduce youth and gang violence. We acknowledge the excellent prevention work happening in the city and with this report we hope to shed light on the needs of the relatively small percentage of young people who are falling through the cracks of the prevention sector. Key findings from the Needs and Resources Analysis report include:

1. Community, school, family, and individual risk factors known to contribute to youth violence and gang involvement are quite prevalent in Worcester:
  - Family residential instability and economic stress
  - Youth and adult unemployment
  - Early childhood trauma
  - Generational cycles of gang and criminal involvement
  - Distressed built environment coupled with limited neighborhood recreational activities
  - School climate and punitive discipline policies
  - Youth mental health, substance abuse, and exposure to violence
2. Worcester has a strong prevention sector and emerging programs for proven-risk young men. However, the location and types of community resources and the location of violent crime hotspots have been persistent over time. Business as usual is insufficient to address gang and youth violence. Worcester needs a strategic, coordinated plan to addressing youth and gang violence because currently we have siloes instead of systems. We also need to build trust and respect between families and providers to counter families’ isolation and disconnection from resources.
3. Given these findings, Worcester needs to prioritize the following possible directions for action:
  - A concerted focus on early childhood health, education, and overall wellbeing
  - Restorative Justice approaches in schools and the community that can divert young people from entering the juvenile justice system
  - Significant street outreach presence to interrupt violence and connect young people to resources
  - Effective community-based sanctions for those awaiting trial or on probation in the community
  - Effective reentry programs that support young men coming back into the community and reduce the likelihood of recidivism
  - Trauma-sensitive services and environments

There is potential for early identification and diversion at various stages of a young person’s life. Not taking action has costs not only for the victims and perpetrators of violence, but for our community as a whole. We look forward to the community conversations that will take place in response to this report. We hope to incorporate the lived experiences of residents to complement this analysis and help us move towards action. We are convinced that through dialogue and concerted collaborative work, we can transform these community conditions for the betterment of everyone who lives and works in Worcester.

## Timeline of Strategic Planning Process

---

### Worcester's Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Planning Process

**2006:** Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiatives introduces Comprehensive Gang Model to Worcester

---

**2012:** Governor Deval Patrick introduces the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative for proven risk men

---

**Fall 2013:** City of Worcester undertakes needs and resources analysis of factors contributing to and preventing youth and gang violence in the city

Assessment Leadership Team is convened

Shannon Advisory Committee is engaged.

---

**Jan-March 2014:** Needs and resources analysis report shared with city residents through dozens of community conversations

---

**April 2014: Community Meeting One:** Over 150 residents identify and prioritize six areas for action to address youth violence (Early Childhood Health and Wellbeing, Youth Activities, Youth-Adult Relationships, Suspension Policy & School Culture, Employment, Specific Strategies for Black and Latino Young Men and Women)

---

**April--May 2014:** Six working groups meet to develop goals and strategies

---

**May 2014: Community Meeting Two:** 70 participants, many of whom were in a working group refined goals and strategies

---

**May-Sept 2014:** Finalize goals and strategies, determine responsibility and accountability mechanisms, with clear benchmarks and indicators of success.

---

**Sept 2014: Community Meeting Three:** Present Strategic Plan to city and propose resident oversight committee

---

**Sept 2014 and beyond:** Implement plan and establish regular accountability check-ins

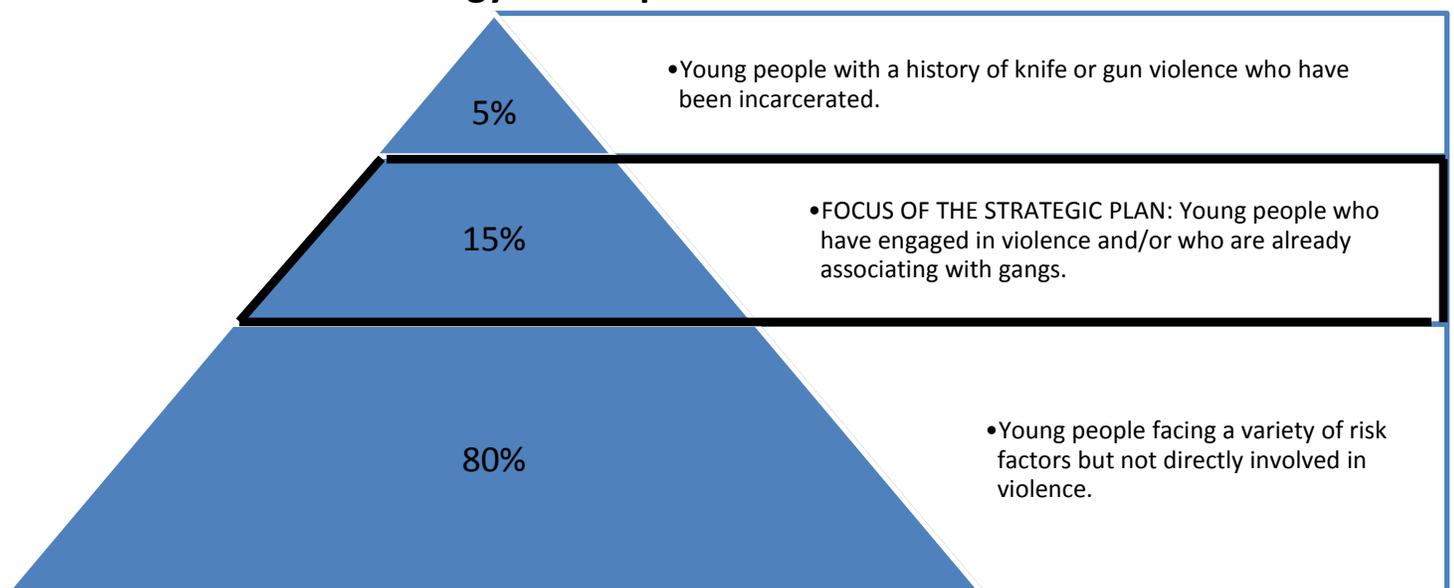
---

# PRELIMINARY OVERARCHING GOALS FOR WORCESTER'S YOUTH VIOLENCE STRATEGIC PLAN (revised 5/23/14)

The following five goals represent a synthesis of the goals that emerged out of the six working groups:

1. PROMOTE AN ETHIC OF TRUST & CARE IN THE COMMUNITY: Rich with deep & culturally appropriate mentoring, collaboration, support-not-punishment ethos, youth & adults working together and practicing effective communication.
2. ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR HEALTH, EDUCATION, ACTIVITIES, AND EMPLOYMENT
3. INCREASE COLLABORATION AND BREAK DOWN SILOS
4. BREAK CYCLES OF VIOLENCE
5. PRIORITIZE STRATEGIES SPECIFIC TO BLACK AND LATINO MALES AND FEMALES

## Framework for Strategy Development



Domain	Domain Goals	Strategies	Conveners (proposed)	Progress to Date
Early Childhood Education & Wellbeing	Increase access to high quality, trauma-informed early education & health services children of proven-risk/incarcerated parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect children ages 0-5 of proven-risk/incarcerated parents to high quality early education and health services through a pilot program</li> <li>Develop, strengthen, and incentivize programs and networks for fathers based on trusting relationships</li> <li>Support mothers through evidence-based programs and through strengthening informal networks</li> </ul>	Dianne Bruce, Edward Street Childcare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiated conversation with Dr. Linda Sager</li> <li>Researching barriers high risk families face when accessing services as well as on informal networks high risk families rely on to take care of children</li> </ul>
Increase the number of high-risk youth accessing programs	Reduce barriers to service for high-risk and proven-risk youth and young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase # of low barrier resources for youth and families &amp; decrease barriers to high quality resources</li> <li>Develop strategies to identify high-risk youth earlier and reach out to their families about resources</li> <li>Institute a coordinated, citywide street outreach team that builds relationships with youth and families to connect them to programs and services and can respond in the aftermath of violent incidents</li> </ul>	Raquel Castro-Corazzini, City of Worcester Youth Opportunities Office; Charles Luster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalizing citywide approach to street outreach</li> <li>Completing mapping/inventory of resources</li> <li>Developing approach to identify high-risk youth in non-punitive and stigmatizing manner</li> </ul>
Divert young people from juvenile & criminal justice system	Reduce # of youth being arrested and resist # of youth being charged with crimes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop restorative justice models to keep low-risk offenders out of the system</li> <li>Develop peer mediation programs</li> <li>Enhance relationships between youth and law-enforcement officials through evidence-based training</li> </ul>	Lynsey Heffernan, Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met with DA Early regarding diversion programs &amp; Center for Non-violent Solutions re: Peer Mediation</li> <li>Researching feasibility of alternatives to detention</li> </ul>
Suspension Policy and School Climate	Reduce use of out-of-school suspensions in the schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create alternatives for suspension that are progressive and developmental rather than punitive</li> <li>Research schools that have successfully implemented alternative disciplinary practices</li> <li>Support enforcement of Chapter 222 in WPS</li> </ul>	Jen Carey, Worcester Educational Collab. Hilda Ramirez, LEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools exploring trauma-informed approaches and restorative justice models</li> <li>Initiated multi-sector working group</li> </ul>
Youth Employment	Reduce barriers to employment for high-risk and proven-risk youth and young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop job opportunities for young people w/ CORI's</li> <li>Develop work readiness programs specific to the needs of high-risk and proven risk youth and young adults, including education component</li> <li>Develop education-career pipelines for high-risk and proven risk youth and young adults</li> </ul>	Jeff Turgeon, CMWIB; Sarai Rivera, Worcester City Councilor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying key stakeholders</li> <li>Inventorying existing youth employment programs</li> </ul>