

**REPORT OF THE MINNEAPOLIS  
YOUTH VIOLENCE REVIEW  
COMMISSION**

**JANUARY 7, 2013**

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# Report of the Minneapolis Youth Violence Review Commission

## INTRODUCTION

This Report constitutes the findings and recommendations of the Minneapolis Youth Violence Review Commission. The Commission was formed by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak on July 30, 2012. Andrew M. Luger of the law firm Greene Espel was appointed by Mayor Rybak to perform the work of the Commission. Mr. Luger was assisted by Erin Sindberg Porter, an attorney at Greene Espel.

The Commission was charged with reviewing the City's efforts pursuant to the January 2008 youth violence prevention initiative entitled "Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis." The Blueprint was a multi-jurisdictional effort under the umbrella of the Minneapolis Department of Health. In 2008, the Blueprint announced four major goals for youth violence prevention in Minneapolis:

- **Goal One.** Every young person in Minneapolis is supported by at least one trusted adult in their family or their community.
- **Goal Two.** Intervene at the first sign that youth and families are at risk for or involved in violence.
- **Goal Three.** Do not give up on our kids; work to restore and get them back on track.
- **Goal Four.** Recognize that violence is learned and can be unlearned by reducing the impact of violent messages in our media, culture and entertainment.

Under the Blueprint, the Department of Health coordinated city efforts designed to prevent youth violence in Minneapolis. Within the Department, the City hired a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator and formed a Youth Violence Prevention Executive Committee. The task of this Commission is to review the efforts of the City pursuant to the Blueprint, the Executive Committee and the Coordinator and to make recommendations for future youth violence prevention efforts.

In performing its work, the Commission:

- Reviewed reports, files and other documents of the Department of Health and the Executive Committee;
- Reviewed studies and conference reports by other agencies and entities addressing youth violence prevention in Minneapolis;
- Reviewed reports and studies of youth violence prevention efforts in other parts of the United States;
- Interviewed the co-chairs of the Executive Committee;
- Interviewed the Youth Violence Coordinator and the Commissioner of the Department of Health;

- Interviewed employees, officers, volunteers and officials from the Minneapolis Police Department, the Hennepin County Probation Department, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Minneapolis Public Schools, neighborhood groups, the public library system, mentoring agencies, non-profit organizations and numerous other interested individuals.

The Commission thanks the staff of Mayor Rybak, the Department of Health and the many City employees who offered their time and expertise to assist in our work. The work of this Commission was made easier by the extraordinary cooperation we received.

## SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we detail in the body of this Report, the Commission found that many of the premises behind the Blueprint were well founded and in keeping with best practices for youth violence prevention efforts. Most notably, the four goals set forth in the Blueprint were, and remain today, critical building blocks for a successful violence prevention strategy. In addition, the Commission found that many of the programs and initiatives supported by the work of the Department of Health staff and the Executive Committee met the objectives of the Blueprint and advanced, in a significant way, the City's youth violence prevention goals.

But the issues and circumstances facing Minneapolis five years ago have changed. In years past, organized gangs, with leadership structures and a defined hierarchy, played an important role in youth violence. In addition, in the past, there were fewer national resources available to cities for addressing youth violence. And, in 2008, the public health approach to preventing youth violence was less developed.

Today, the gangs that attract our youth into a world of violence are far more decentralized. They often do not have clear leadership, and young people migrate from gang to gang. As a result, youth discover violence informally, on the street and among their friends. Most importantly, they are being drawn into illegal activity at frighteningly young ages. Many are recruited by older siblings, although the new gangs also lead to family members belonging to different organizations. Others are drawn to violence for lack of a meaningful alternative.

Since 2008, many communities have developed public health strategies for the prevention of crime, and the federal government has provided resources to cities adopting this approach. In addition, over the past five years, the court system has spearheaded juvenile justice reform efforts, including alternatives to detention and out of home placement.

As gangs have become less organized and hierarchical, respect for family, authority and the law has deteriorated. The age of young kids recruited to a life of violence has dropped and the juvenile justice reforms have changed how and when intervention occurs. Some of the programs and approaches that made sense five years ago therefore require updating. In addition, there is a need in the city for more coordination and dialogue among those involved in youth violence prevention efforts to address the second goal of the Blueprint, early intervention.

Cities around the country have tested neighborhood-based, proactive initiatives to counteract some of the changes affecting youth violence. Recently, the Hennepin County courts launched a proactive pilot program in which the criminal justice and child welfare systems coordinate services and approaches to at-risk youth. We believe Minneapolis should spearhead a proactive, neighborhood-based initiative to prevent youth violence.

After five years under the Blueprint, the Commission recommends that the city's efforts should be revised and enhanced to meet the new challenges we are facing today. In this report, we propose some new approaches to augment the work already underway in Minneapolis, new ideas that we believe are well suited for the current environment. In this regard, we note that our discussions with city officials, non-profit employees and neighborhood groups point to a developing consensus among those involved in violence prevention that compels some changes

in how the City organizes its youth violence prevention work. Our findings demonstrate that the City's youth violence prevention work should become more proactive and more neighborhood-based. The City should assist those involved in the neighborhoods and in the criminal justice system by helping to coordinate their efforts. We also find that the City's efforts to combat youth violence would be significantly enhanced by a campaign to recruit 500 new mentors to provide trusted adult relationships to those youth who otherwise wait as long as a year for a match.

Accordingly, this Report contains the following recommendations:

- 1. City Leaders should spearhead a Campaign to Recruit 500 New Mentors in 2013.** The first goal in the Blueprint, ensuring that each child is connected with a trusted adult, is also the most elusive. At-risk youth currently wait for months or longer to receive a mentor. We recommend that the City develop a highly visible campaign, led by city leaders including the mayor and police chief, to recruit 500 new mentors in the year 2013. All evidence suggests that mentoring is the single best way, outside of strong family relationships, to provide our youth with positive adult interaction.
- 2. Create an "At-Risk Youth Coordinator" Position to Provide Those Who Interact with Youth Access to Services and Resources With a "One Stop Shopping" Approach.** Many city employees, volunteers and others interact on a regular basis with at-risk youth. They often work, however, in isolation and without a direct link to services, programs and opportunities. As a result, some of those working directly with at-risk youth lack information about available programming and resources. We recommend that the City hire an At-Risk Youth Coordinator to be a one phone call resource for all of those who see a need but do not have the ability to act on it. The position will be on-the ground and visible in the community. This person should have credibility in the neighborhoods and in the police department and social service agencies.
- 3. Increase the Involvement of the Minneapolis Police Department and Hennepin County Attorney's Office.** Currently, the work under the Blueprint is coordinated by the Department of Health. The MPD, however, has day-to-day interaction with those most at risk for violent behavior, while the County Attorney's office handles cases of first time and repeat juvenile offenders. Although we agree with the sentiment behind the statement in the Blueprint that "more arrests, larger prisons, longer sentences and trying children as adults will not solve the problem," law enforcement and prosecutors have a critical role to play in violence prevention. This is especially true now that the MPD has School Resource Officers in many Minneapolis schools. The SRO's are aware of mounting tensions among factions, potential triggers for conflict, and monitor the fall-out from violent incidents. Many of the SRO's have also developed their own programs to provide youth with positive adult interactions and model appropriate behavior. The MPD, City Attorney and Hennepin County Attorney can play an important role in the planning and implementation of youth violence prevention efforts. The City should ensure that the both prosecutor's offices are included in discussions regarding new approaches to youth violence prevention.

- 4. Form a Youth Violence Prevention Working Group.** Neighborhood activists, law enforcement, prosecutors, mentoring groups and others who interact with at-risk youth on a daily basis, should meet, along with the At-Risk Youth Coordinator, on a monthly basis to coordinate activities, including providing services to at-risk youth, and to discuss best practices.

# THE MINNEAPOLIS YOUTH VIOLENCE REVIEW COMMISSION'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## OVERVIEW OF THE BLUEPRINT AND EFFORTS TO DATE

### *Background*

As a result of increasing crime rates fueled in part by a rise in violent crime involving young people, in 2007 Mayor R.T. Rybak and the City Council created the Youth Violence Prevention Steering Committee. In January 2008, the Steering Committee issued the “Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis.” The Blueprint announced a new effort to combat youth violence in Minneapolis stating that “youth violence is a public health epidemic that requires a holistic, multi-faceted response. . .”

In keeping with best practices in youth violence prevention at the time, the Blueprint called on community, government, faith, business and neighborhood partners to coordinate in an effort to combat youth violence. Although the Blueprint recognized the role of law enforcement, it emphasized public health strategies over strategies related to the criminal justice system.

Also in keeping with best practices, the Blueprint announced the four goals described above. Our review of similar programs around the country supports the Blueprint’s statement of these four goals as the building blocks for a compelling violence prevention effort. In particular goals one and two – ensuring that youth have access to trusted adults and that communities intervene at the earliest signs that youth are at risk – are prevalent in youth violence initiatives, plans and programs in various cities around the country.

After the Blueprint was announced, city leaders formed the Executive Committee and hired a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator to work directly with the Commissioner of Health. The Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator has offices in the Health Department and reports to the Commissioner and the Mayor. The Executive Committee holds regular meetings to consider initiatives and programs and to review the results of efforts undertaken through the Blueprint.

### *Programs and Initiatives*

During the past five years, the City has sponsored a number of initiatives within the framework of the Blueprint. Perhaps the largest and most prominent is the STEP-UP Summer Jobs Program. STEP-UP is a job and internship program designed to connect youth from 14-21 with jobs, including career-oriented jobs. STEP-UP has received national attention for its focus on at-risk youth and the City’s success in finding paid internships and summer jobs for participants. Through this program, city leaders recruit businesses to take on STEP-UP interns and employees. Since the inception of STEP-UP, the program has grown to 221 employers, and has matched almost 16,000 youth with internships. STEP-UP employers include Wells Fargo, U.S. Bank, HealthPartners and many other companies.

Other significant programs under the Blueprint umbrella include North4 (a partnership that helps gang affiliated youth obtain jobs), Summer 612 (a youth led campaign using sports and art to raise awareness of youth violence) and a number of school-based initiatives. Those we interviewed praised these efforts and generally found them to be effective.

These and other programs tended to fall under one of the four goals of the Blueprint. STEP-UP, for example, has provided thousands of young people with trusted, positive adult relationships. Many of the school-based and other initiatives focus on intervention at the earliest possible stages for at-risk youths. North4 and other employment related initiatives fall within the third goal as the City strives not to give up on young people involved in criminal activity. And Summer 612 was designed to address goal four, unlearning the culture of violence.

Since the Blueprint was issued, city staff members have coordinated a great deal of violence prevention activity. They have developed effective programs, interacted with other cities and with federal agencies, and pursued funding and support from state and federal sources. Through Results Minneapolis, the staff tracks the success of its efforts and develops new and creative ideas to address youth violence.

### *Youth Violence Issues Confronting the City Today*

In the past, well organized and highly structured gangs provided an important entry point for youth to become involved in violent activity. Gang members sought to increase the success of their gang by growing their numbers through the active recruitment of interested youth. Once involved in a gang, young people learned a culture of violence and behavioral norms that conformed to the particular gang. These behavioral norms were difficult to break, and the repercussions for leaving a gang or joining another gang were severe. Under this regime, gang members changed gangs infrequently, and youth often grew up in the one gang that recruited them.

In response, law enforcement targeted gang leaders as a way to break up the gangs, decrease violence and build safer neighborhoods. By all accounts, these efforts were successful, to a degree. Over time, the traditional gangs, and gang structures, deteriorated. Leaders went to prison and gang longevity and continuity was diminished. But something had to fill the void; something had to take the place of the formerly well-structured gangs.

Nothing positive or socially acceptable stepped in to take the place of the now diminished gangs. As neighborhood and faith leaders have explained, loosely organized gangs became an alternative family for many at-risk youth. Young people talked about gangs as a place where they felt welcomed, something lacking in the rest of their lives. When the well polished gang structure disappeared, newer, more fragmented gangs arose. This new model was less hierarchical and less prone to loyalty and longevity. But the attraction – a place to call home – remained the same. While some were drawn to their neighborhood gang for the chance to earn money through violence, others were drawn simply to be part of something.

According to those who confront this new reality on a daily basis, something else changed. Gangs that once attracted 17-year olds, now attract 11 and 12-year olds. As police

officers, faith leaders and neighborhood activists have explained to this Commission, the change is noticeable, and persistent. They witness 11-year olds with guns, and 16-year old members recruiting younger siblings. Ironically, the lack of structure and longevity within the gangs has unleashed an “anything goes” mentality that leads to more and younger members being drawn into the violent lifestyle. While effective law enforcement techniques broke up the well organized gangs, the new gangs are highly troublesome and difficult to address.

One additional item has affected the culture of violence for these young people. With the gang structure diminishing, and the role of the gang changing, the incitement to violence has changed as well. In the past, gang violence was often directed at the protection of “territory” or business relationships. Gangs depended on control of an area, and the income generating business opportunities that went with it. But with the loss of structure came less of a focus on territory as a signature basis for gang existence. As territorial control, business opportunities and loyalty have become less clear, some of the causes for gang and youth violence have changed. Now, more than ever, youth violence is caused by rumor and innuendo, often the result of a dispute over a personal relationship. With the advent of smart phones, the widespread availability of the Internet and social media and the informality of gang relationships, a demeaning or jealousy-inciting text or other perceived sign of disrespect can spark a violent reaction. As a result, violence is less predictable and more immediate. Violence is also broadcast immediately. Today, youth download videos of violent conflicts from their smart phones to the Internet, promoting more violence and inciting further conflict.

These changes, and others, in the behavior of young people involved in violent activity necessitate new approaches to youth violence prevention. As we discuss in this report, the city’s efforts to date have met with success – good programs have attracted youth in productive activities. But the new realities of youth violence, particularly the less-structured neighborhood gangs, the increasingly younger gang members, and the less predictable flashpoints, require a fresh look at how to address the violence of today.

As part of our work, we found a number of examples of efforts that use proactive coordinated programs to address youth violence.

One model we reviewed is the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative in Seattle, Washington. There, the city has adopted a proactive approach that does not wait for youth to seek help. Initiative employees seek out at-risk youth through neighborhood networks that are highly attuned to developments on the ground. The program relies on community-led networks that coordinate services for at-risk youth. City employees work with neighborhood groups, faith leaders, the school system and others to coordinate services and identify at-risk youth. The Seattle program has been heavily funded and staffed. In this report, we draw from some of the ideas that led to the Seattle initiative.

The Hennepin County court system has recently started a pilot program that is similarly proactive and collaborative. The Hennepin County Crossover Youth Model is designed to address at-risk youth early in the criminal justice process. With the support of the Casey Foundation and Georgetown University, the judges in Hennepin County are working with “crossover” youth – youth who have experienced maltreatment and have engaged in

delinquency. Under this program, when a minor appears in court for a delinquency charge, the court system will determine whether that minor has already interacted with the court for mental health issues, child protection issues or other matters that relate to maltreatment or the need for services. If so, the courts will assign both the delinquency and the child welfare matters to the same judge. That judge will then work with probation, social service agencies, the family and others to bring a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the various issues facing the child. While this does not apply if the minor is involved in certain types of violent misconduct, it is designed to coordinate care for early stage at-risk youth in our community. Under this initiative, which is also being tested elsewhere, the court system will work with all involved in the young person's life (including mentors) to create a plan to keep the minor from a life of crime. It is an ambitious, proactive approach that presents many challenges, but holds great promise.

Finally, the Neighborhood Achievement Zone ("NAZ"), a relatively new initiative, is also taking a proactive and coordinated approach to reducing youth violence. NAZ was formed to improve the chances for children in a specific zone of North Minneapolis to graduate from college. Its mission is to build a culture of achievement to ensure that all youth and their families in the zone receive mentoring, skills development and other collaborative and comprehensive services to improve college graduation rates. NAZ brings together government agencies, families, neighbors, mentors, schools and other organizations to make sure that at-risk youth have the support system they need to succeed. NAZ has received significant funding for this effort. Interestingly, NAZ focuses on "achievement" and "success" (measured by college graduation) rather than violence prevention. NAZ officials believe that re-framing the discussion around success rather than prevention presents the issues concerning at-risk youth in a more positive light and assists them in attracting families.

## RESPONSES TO THE BLUEPRINT

Much of our time was spent meeting with a wide variety of individuals and organizations involved in efforts to prevent and address youth violence in Minneapolis. These included the faith community, neighborhood groups, police officials, prosecutors, court personnel, probation officers, library workers, School Resource Officers, mentoring agencies, and many others. These interviews and meetings proved that there is a strong consensus about what is needed for the city to enhance its youth violence prevention efforts. In our meetings, interested parties focused less on criticism of work performed under the Blueprint, and more on areas that need to be addressed in light of the changes outlined above. These areas are summarized below:

### *Mentoring and Connecting Youth With Trusted Adults*

There is a broad consensus that mentoring is the single most effective way (outside of strong family relationships) to ensure that at-risk youth have access to trusted adults. The Twin Cities is home to many professional mentoring agencies. These agencies are connected, in varying degrees, to organizations that work on youth violence prevention. But their reach is limited. Each mentoring agency has a waiting list for boys. As they explained, boys sign up for a mentor, and often wait for a full year or longer for a mentor to be assigned. During this time, they can and do lose interest in being mentored and develop a cynicism about the process. Without sufficient mentors, our current system takes some at-risk youth who are looking for a way out and in fact makes the situation worse. While efforts were made early on after release of the Blueprint to increase the number of mentors in the city, such efforts never rose to the levels needed to reduce, in a significant way, the mentoring waiting lists. Currently, there are hundreds of boys on lists waiting for mentors, with an expectation that it will take approximately one year for many of them to get a match. There are simply too few mentors to address the pressing need in our community. More needs to be done.

Mentoring groups interact with the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator and with a number of neighborhood groups and non-profit agencies addressing youth violence prevention. These groups also work with the business community to attract mentors. Like many organizations and individuals who spoke with us, some mentoring agencies expressed a desire for more coordination of prevention efforts. They are interested in participating in a proactive effort to attract more mentors, and to match mentors with the most at-risk youth identified by others.

We believe that a visible and well supported campaign by city leaders designed to attract large numbers of new mentors would help eliminate the one year delay in assigning mentors for young boys. These agencies have many opportunities for adults to get involved; adults can sign up in partnership to mentor youth with work colleagues, friends, spouses, or even as a family. The agencies provide training and support. If successful, this campaign would constitute a significant step in addressing the city's goal of ensuring that at-risk youth are connected to a trusted adult.

### *Bringing the Blueprint to the Neighborhoods*

One common observation of the city's efforts under the Blueprint is that, over time, neighborhood groups, the faith community and others who interact on a daily basis with at-risk youth have become less involved in new initiatives and plans. At the same time, those same neighborhood-based individuals and entities lack a mechanism for coordinating their work with youth to prevent violence. When brought together for meetings with the Commission, it became clear that many different branches of government, along with agencies and volunteers, interact with the same young people. Around a table, they compared notes, stories and ideas. The people who have the most involvement with our city's youth clearly need ways to coordinate their work and to simplify the process of proactively providing services where coordinated action can make a difference.

This is a two part problem. First, the city needs to address the fact that too many people work within their assigned silos, without a mechanism for comparing issues and planning with any others who interact with at-risk youth. A number of people expressed to us that the city should assist those involved to coordinate their efforts and the flow of information about the highest at-risk youth. They believe that regular meetings both to discuss specific concerns and to plan responses, should help. Second, those who interact with at-risk youth often do not know who to call to begin a coordinated care plan and provide a troubled young boy or girl with the right services. At the moment, there is no one source of information for the library workers, probation officers, police officers, faith leaders, school officials and many others who are trying to assist at-risk youth.

The city should create the position of At-Risk Youth Coordinator both to chair regular meetings in the neighborhoods and to provide that single source of information who can take proactive steps to coordinate services for those most at risk. An At-Risk Youth Coordinator who knows the services available, the people who interact with youth and the urgency of coordinated and timely action would help bring the Blueprint to the neighborhoods in a new way. The city should also create a central repository of information about available programming and resources, and about at-risk youth. A database of information that the city receives from agencies and with "tips" on which youth need which services, would provide valuable insight at various touch points. The City Attorney's office and the County Attorney's office should provide guidance on data privacy concerns as city staff develop the central repository.

### *The Role of Law Enforcement*

The Blueprint was based, in great part, on the view that youth violence is a public health problem. This view was and is widely held by those addressing youth violence around the country. A number of cities have embraced the public health approach to violence prevention, as have numerous federal agencies that work together with local jurisdictions on youth violence.

The focus in the Blueprint on public health programs, however, has been perceived as sidelining valuable law enforcement resources. This should change. We spoke with law enforcement officers and prosecutors who generally agree with the Blueprint's mandate that

more arrests will not prevent more violence. At the same time, however, the criminal justice system has a meaningful role in violence prevention.

First, law enforcement officers and prosecutors are a critical source of information on the latest neighborhood and family developments, gang affiliations, personal disputes and other causes of violence. They tend to know those most at risk, and they accumulate a great deal of information about them and their circumstances. School resource officers, in particular, are on the front lines and have a unique perspective into the causes of youth violence. Consequently, police officers and prosecutors need to play a significant role in neighborhood based crime prevention. And they want to. One method for assuring that law enforcement is engaged in the city's efforts is to have the At-Risk Coordinator report to the Police Chief, as well as to the Mayor, and by having police officers and prosecutors present at the regular neighborhood meetings. Law enforcement should play a more significant role in Blueprint related activities in the next five years.

Second, as is generally accepted among those we interviewed, punishment is sometimes the right answer. Law enforcement officers and prosecutors interact with young people who have been arrested and released many times. They see the effect a lack of punishment can have both on those who have long records, and on those they recruit. As law enforcement officers and prosecutors have relayed to us in great detail, someone who is arrested and released repeatedly spreads his disrespect for the criminal justice system to younger recruits. Those recruits are taught that there may not be consequences for their actions.

Prosecutors, police officers, probation officers and our courts have engaged in a constructive dialogue concerning the right balance between creative, non-custodial alternatives for youth and detention. There are no simple answers to these issues, and no way to predict with any certainty how to strike this balance. We would like to see district court judges invited to participate in neighborhood meetings on youth violence prevention strategies. When specific individuals or cases will be discussed, judges most likely cannot be present. But when initiatives and programs are considered, Hennepin County judges can provide valuable insight.

Finally, we suggest that those involved in the criminal justice system, as well as neighborhood groups, consider working together on a mechanism to review specific cases of youth violence that resulted in homicide. Such an effort could mirror the Hennepin County Domestic Fatality Review work that has assisted in the evaluation of cases leading to domestic abuse related fatalities. In the youth violence prevention arena, we envision a collaborative effort to study cases in order to understand how neighborhood groups, government entities, law enforcement, faith leaders and others could have taken steps, or could have coordinated services, in a manner that might have led to a different result.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Mentoring: A Citywide Campaign to Recruit 500 New Mentors.** Wherever one looks in the literature about youth violence, the subject of mentoring appears. It is in national publications, city initiatives and scholarly articles about preventing youth violence. In Seattle, the violence prevention initiative cites to the experiences of mentored youth, and the successes of a well organized mentoring plan. Where family and neighborhood relationships are not sufficient, mentors provide at-risk youth with the much needed trusted adult contact. Indeed, in all of our work, nothing has come up as often or has garnered such agreement as the need to find well trained and committed mentors for our at-risk youth. The question, then, is how to do it. We recommend the following steps:
  - a. Buy-In From City Leaders.** The Mayor, Police Chief and members of the City Council should declare that increasing the number of well trained mentors in the city is of paramount importance to the success of the Blueprint. No city-wide effort will succeed without the enthusiastic and active support of these critical city leaders.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Set a Realistic Goal.** The City should set a goal for new mentors that is both achievable and addresses the needs of the community. Based on our discussions with interested parties, we have come to the conclusion that approximately 500 new mentors are needed in the coming year to reduce the wait list and ensure that at-risk youth are connected with a trusted adult quickly.
  - c. Build a Campaign.** As city leaders have done with STEP-UP summer jobs, they should build a highly visible campaign to promote mentoring, and to recruit new mentors. The leading mentoring agencies should be involved, and should prepare materials to explain the mentoring process including training and support. In order to succeed, the campaign should become a high priority for the city.
- 2. Create the Position of At-Risk Youth Coordinator.** Currently, the Blueprint is staffed by a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator who reports to the Mayor and the Commissioner of Health. The Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator wears many hats. She seeks funding for new city-related violence prevention programs, develops and works on the current programs and coordinates with national resources on best practices. Given these responsibilities, the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator cannot be expected to work closely on a daily basis with neighborhood groups, volunteers and government employees. The city should create the position of At-Risk Youth Coordinator to serve as a one stop resource for those interacting with at-risk youth. The At-Risk Youth Coordinator can help coordinate the work of different agency staff and volunteers and can facilitate regular neighborhood meetings focused on sharing information and strategies related to at-risk youth (see Recommendation 3).

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<sup>1</sup> County officials, such as the Hennepin County Attorney, Sheriff and County Commissioners should be asked to participate in this effort as well.

- a. Reporting Relationships.** We recommend that the At-Risk Youth Coordinator report both to the Commissioner of Health and the Police Chief. In this manner, the At-Risk Youth Coordinator will have the attention of those involved in youth services and law enforcement. We expect that this will assist in enhancing the role of law enforcement in youth violence prevention efforts.
  - b. Qualifications.** The At-Risk Youth Coordinator should have substantial experience working at the street level with gangs, at-risk youth and neighborhood groups. A former law enforcement officer with this background would be ideal.
  - c. Longevity.** Turnover among those working with at-risk youth hinders the ability of the city to act proactively and in a coordinated manner. The At-Risk Youth Coordinator should commit to the position for a minimum amount of time. The longer this person can serve, the more credibility he or she will have with staff, volunteers, law enforcement and neighborhood groups.
- 3. Increase the Involvement of Law Enforcement in Youth Violence Prevention.** We spoke with many law enforcement officers about their ability to contribute to youth violence prevention efforts. They are an indispensable resource in the city's effort to connect youth with trusted adults and in efforts to reach at-risk youth as early as possible. The MPD, and county and city prosecutors, should be included in all efforts to prevent youth violence and should be sought out as critical sources of information on the causes of violent activity in the neighborhoods.
- 4. Form a Youth Violence Prevention Working Group.** Along with the Executive Committee, the city should form a neighborhood based Youth Violence Prevention Working Group comprised of agency staff, law enforcement officers, the faith community, prosecutors, library workers, staff from mentoring agencies, probation officers, neighborhood groups, volunteers and others who interact with at-risk youth. This working group should meet monthly, in the community. The meetings should be facilitated by the At-Risk Youth Coordinator, who will coordinate the discussions at the meetings and provide the participants with information about services and programs available to at-risk youth consistent with the needs of the working group's members.