

# The Boston Strategy To Prevent Youth Violence

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## **THE PROGRAMS**

By joining together, the partners involved in the Boston Strategy have developed a wide variety of innovative and successful programs, initiatives and collaborations. Two initiatives—Operation Night Light and Operation Cease Fire—form the core of the Boston Strategy. Many innovative collaborations have developed and are described below along with several new programs focused on improving student school attendance and providing career-path jobs. Numerous other programs have played, and continue to play, a critical supporting role.

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## **THE PROGRAMS**

### **Operation Night Light**

Operation Night Light is a partnership between police and probation that provides the court with a tool to enforce the terms of probation. Teams of police and probation officers together make evening visits to the homes of youthful probationers to ensure the terms of probation are being met. The project developed from a collaboration in 1992 between probation officers in the Dorchester District Court and Boston Police Officers in the Anti-Gang Violence Unit, who re-thought their mission and strategy as a consequence of their frustrations on the street.

The project was recognized as both innovative and successful and pushed forward by executives in both police and probation; this, in turn, led to the establishment of Night Light as a formal partnership between the Boston Police Department and the Office of the Commissioner of Probation for Massachusetts. Night Light is now a central tactic in Boston's multi-jurisdictional, highly collaborative strategy to deter and prevent youth gang firearm violence. More than a dozen other probation jurisdictions throughout Massachusetts have implemented similar programs. Anyone who is hired as a probation officer in Boston after March 1, 1999, is bound to do at least 20% of their work week in the community, in non-traditional hours.

### **Operation Cease Fire**

The cutting edge of the Boston Strategy is Operation Cease Fire, an innovative collaboration that focuses targeted interventions on those most likely to become the offenders and victims in firearm violence.

Operation Cease Fire is a multi-jurisdictional effort to quickly suppress flare-ups of firearm violence in gang "hot spots," to prioritize prosecutions and to disrupt the trafficking in firearms to youth gangs.

This collaboration features the US Attorney's office; BATF; Boston Police Department; the Suffolk County District Attorney's office; Probation; Parole; the Department of Youth Services (DYS); the US Drug Enforcement Administration; the Massachusetts State Police; Boston Streetworkers; the Ten Point Coalition; Boston Public Schools Safety Services; The Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; and other local public safety agencies and community leaders. To achieve its overall goal of reducing and preventing firearm violence, Cease Fire pursues three interrelated basic objectives.

First, led by the Boston Police Department's Youth Violence Strike Force, the collaborative uses order maintenance tactics to quickly "cool" any area of the city in which gang firearm violence flares. The police and others respond quickly, based on incidents and shared intelligence. They meet with community members to review the tactics to be deployed and, most significantly, they meet with the gang members to lay out in concrete terms the intensive police attention they will experience unless the violence stops. Once the violence ceases, maintenance of the peace is ensured by the district beat team officers who work in the area.

Secondly, the most dangerous offenders are targeted for priority prosecutions, with the US Attorney's Office and the District Attorney deciding jointly on which offenders to

prosecute in the federal system. Several successful federal prosecutions of pivotal gun trafficking and career criminal offenders have resulted.

Equally important, the collaborative works to disrupt the flow of arms to the gangs. In developing the strategy, the BPD's Youth Violence Strike Force collaborated with Harvard's Kennedy School, who, under NIJ sponsorship, conducted extensive research on the offenders and victims in youth homicides and on the flow of firearms, utilizing pioneering trace work done since 1991 by BATF and the BPD. This knowledge formed the foundation for the strategy.

Operation Cease Fire has received the following awards:

- Winner – 1999 Webber Seavey Award, International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Winner – 1998 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing
- Winner – 1997 State and Local Government Award, Innovations in American Government – A partnership among the Ford Foundation, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and the Council for Excellence in Government

### **Youth Violence Strike Force**

The Youth Violence Strike Force is not a program, but rather a member of the Boston Police Department's Special Operations Division. It is a multi-agency, coordinated task force made up of 50 full time Boston Police Officers and 15 officers from outside agencies. The membership of the Youth Violence Strike Force includes the Massachusetts State Police, the Department of Treasury's – Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, police departments from neighboring jurisdictions, Massachusetts Corrections, Probation and Parole, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) juvenile correction officers and other agencies as appropriate. It works closely with the Suffolk County District Attorney's and State Attorney General's Offices and participates in the Department of Justice's Anti-Violent Crime Initiative, led locally by the US Attorney. They are the primary law enforcement entity behind Operation Cease Fire, a multi-jurisdictional effort to quickly suppress flare-ups of firearm violence in gang "hot spots," to prioritize prosecutions and to disrupt the trafficking in firearms to youth gangs.

In 1999 the Youth Violence Strike Force and its many community and law enforcement partners jointly received the prestigious Webber Seavey Award from the International Association of Chiefs of Police for their ongoing efforts to prevent youth violence. While these important crime prevention measures are part of their everyday jobs, some officers have taken the program one step further. By making home visits to at-risk families along with concerned members of the clergy on their own time, they are further illustrating their commitment to the community they serve.

### **The Youth Service Providers Network**

The Youth Service Providers Network (YSPN) is a partnership between the Boston Police Department and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston. This innovative community policing program grew out of the frustration expressed by police officers that arrest is the only substantive action they can take when dealing with at-risk youth, and that no options existed for troubled youth they encountered during family disturbance calls. Additionally,

police have traditionally held the belief that they are not social workers, and should not be expected to do social work. The YSPN provides police officers with alternatives - resources to assist these youth, namely through the presence and professional skills and abilities of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs). The YSPN LCSW's sole job is to respond to concerns police officers have for at-risk youth they encounter through the course of their work. In essence, this program gives the police officer the ability to get youth the social services they so desperately need, without the added burden of trying to actually perform the social work him/herself.

YSPN referrals come to the LCSW either directly from police officers or through incident reports filed by police officers. The LCSW is based in the local police stationhouse and makes home visits in their Districts on a daily basis. Youth referred to the YSPN receive assistance under a three-tiered system of care; 1) intake and assessment, 2) short-term case management, and 3) on-going clinical services. In this year alone the YSPN has accepted over 200 referrals. The YSPN has served over 1,200 young people and their families since its inception in the summer of 1996.

Response from police officers, youth and families has been overwhelming. Police officers have grown to trust and rely on the LCSWs and Client Advocates, recognizing the valuable skills and knowledge they possess as well as the commitment and caring they demonstrate in dealing with troubled youth in the neighborhoods.

Through the YSPN, police officers have resources to assist at-risk youth. This program has greatly alleviated frustration and stress felt by officers in their dealings with youth, further empowering officers to address community concerns, and strengthening the relationship between police and community.

The YSPN is an easily replicable model, based on the simple premise that police officers need resources to assist at-risk and troubled youth. Those resources are embodied in the professional skills, knowledge and ability of Licensed Clinical Social Workers and trained Client Advocates. Police officers can access these resources with one call or a quick note to the LCSW, trusting that he/she will take it from there. Additionally, potential partnerships are available in existing youth development agencies like the Boys & Girls Clubs across the country. In the end, police officers are left with a feeling of job enrichment and personal satisfaction, knowing that they were able to help a youth in need.

### **Street Smarts Initiative**

The Boston Management Consortium, a public-private partnership addressing key city issues, working closely with the Office of the Mayor, Boston Police Department, Boston Public Schools, Streetworker Program of Boston Community Centers, Citizens for Safety, the Suffolk County District Attorney's office, neighborhood organizations and a growing number of area businesses, has formed a unique partnership to coordinate a broad-based, multi-faceted program called the Street Smarts Initiative.

Building on the three principles of neighborhood policing--partnership, problem-solving and prevention--the programs take a holistic approach to violence prevention among youth in Boston.

The Street Smarts Initiative includes a Gun Buyback Program, a Multi-Media Arts Contest, The Peace League and Street Smarts Conflict Resolution Training.

### **Summer of Opportunity**

In 1994, a partnership with the Boston Police Department's Youth Violence Strike Force, John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company and Northeastern University was formed. Aptly named Summer of Opportunity, the program runs over an eight-week period, from mid-June to mid-August, and provides an opportunity for urban youth to learn leadership and life skills, as well as to earn a weekly stipend. The program also includes a year-long after school internship for students who complete the summer program.

Summer of Opportunity was developed in response to the lack of economic opportunity and positive alternatives for youth. The YVSF identified these problems as central contributors to the rising youth violence rate. By providing viable skills, confidence building experiences and alternatives to crime, the program offers youth a way to escape the risks which draw them into gangs.

### **Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)**

The Boston Police Department's G.R.E.A.T. Program is part of a very successful strategy that has dramatically reduced youth crime in Boston.

In 1991 police officers from the Phoenix Police Department and from Mesa, Glendale, and Tempe, Arizona, and special agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms developed Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) to reduce adolescent involvement in criminal behavior and gangs. G.R.E.A.T. is a national, school-based gang prevention program in which uniformed law enforcement officers teach a 9-week curriculum to middle school students. As of June 1996, more than 2,400 officers from 47 states and District of Columbia had completed G.R.E.A.T. training.

### **Boston TenPoint Coalition**

The Coalition is an ecumenical group of Christian clergy and lay leaders working to mobilize the Christian community around issues affecting Black and Latino youth -- especially those at-risk for violence, drug abuse and other destructive behaviors.

The Coalition's goal is not to replace the local church, but to make the local church more effective in the work of rebuilding of communities. It also seeks to build partnerships with community-based, governmental, and private sector institutions which are also committed to the revitalization of the families and communities in which our youth must be raised.

The following programs have been implemented by the Coalition's 52 church and parachurch members: street outreach programs; court advocacy and mentoring programs; economic development; health center partnerships; neighborhood crime watch support; male and female gang intervention programs; suburban and downtown to inner city church partnerships.

### **National Ten-Point Leadership Foundation**

The National Ten-Point Leadership Foundation (NTLF) is a non-profit organization based in Boston, Massachusetts. NTLF's primary mission is to help provide African-American Christian churches with the strategic vision, programmatic structure, and financial

resources necessary to saving at-risk inner-city youth from child abuse and neglect, street violence, drug abuse, school failure, teen-age pregnancy, incarceration, chronic joblessness, spiritual depravity, and hopelessness about the future.

### **Brighter Horizon**

Brighter Horizon is a youth ministry dedicated to transforming the lives of young men confronting legal issues. Brighter Horizon was conceived to provide viable alternatives to juvenile probationers. The philosophical framework of Brighter Horizon promotes the giftedness of each child. Brighter Horizon's mission is to provide a supportive, learning environment for young men seeking to resolve legal conflict and to support their efforts to pursue a promising future. Brighter Horizon provides a value-based curriculum and the skills and resources to assist these young men to surmount legal, educational, and social barriers.

The core values of Brighter Horizon are transformation - viewing oneself as a productive individual, excellence - surpassing individual expectations, altruism - unselfishly concerned for the welfare of others, and restoration - making contributions to community development. Brighter Horizon was developed in 1996 under the auspices of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Brighter Horizon is one of five programs comprising Generation Excel, the youth empowerment and family development initiative of Bethel AME Church. Generation Excel programs include: Do the Write Thing, a partnership with The Boston Streetworker Program, the Fatherhood Program, and Parkside Christian Basketball League. Potential participants for Brighter Horizon are males between 11 - 17 years old, who are first and second time offenders, with a probationary status between 9 - 12 months. They are referred to the 12-month program and its value-based curriculum by District Courts.

Brighter Horizon incorporates a two-phase approach into its curriculum. Five strands of engagement comprise Phase One: court advocacy, tutoring and group discussions, mentoring training, and educational and cultural explorations. Bethel AME Church underwrites programmatic expenses including: American Red Cross training in Community First Aid and Community CPR, a monthly stipend and one-year membership to the YMCA for every participant. Guest presenters, including physicians and graduate students, deliver messages on teenage sexuality, peer pressure, manhood, education, and topics which address the complex issues which young people confront. Graduates of Phase One are invited to enter Phase Two of the program and assume the responsibilities of peer leaders. Peer leaders assist new recruits through Phase One and participate in a community service project.

### **Fatherhood Program**

The Office of the Commissioner of Probation and the probation officers of the district courts have joined together with the Ten Point Coalition to provide Fatherhood Programs to probationers.

The goal of the program is to encourage fathers who have little positive contact with their children to become more responsible. The program emphasizes to the fathers the significant role they play and the importance of modeling appropriate behavior to their children. This is done in a positive way by encouraging them to increase responsible behavior according to five key principles:

1. As a father, it is my responsibility to give AFFECTION to my children.
2. As a father, it is my responsibility to give GENTLE GUIDANCE to my children.
3. As a father, it is my responsibility to give FINANCIAL SUPPORT to my children and the mother of my children.
4. As a father, it is my responsibility to DEMONSTRATE RESPECT at all times to the mother of my children.
5. As a father, it is my responsibility to set a PROUD EXAMPLE for my children by living within the law and without the taint of alcohol/drugs.

### **MatchPoint**

MatchPoint is a collaboration between the Boston TenPoint Coalition and Prison Fellowship Ministries. It is a faith-based mentoring program for youth ages 8 - 18 who are in danger of becoming chronic juvenile offenders. Mentoring is the commitment of a mature Christian adult investing 3-5 hours a week in the growth and development of a young person. It rebuilds, restores, and redirects each youth's life, eternally touching the lives of both the young person and the mentor.

### **Boston Community Centers Streetworker Program**

Drawing on years of experience conducting outreach to Boston's at-risk youth, Boston Community Centers has hired and trained a network of streetworkers whose role is to find "hard to reach" high-risk youth and to help them with issues of substance abuse, court involvement, teen violence, sexuality, etc. through a service delivery system that includes intervention, prevention and advocacy. The targeted youth tend to avoid familial and social support and do not make use of traditional assistance sources such as recreational facilities or other youth serving agencies.

Three senior streetworkers coordinate, facilitate and support the efforts of streetworkers throughout Boston's neighborhoods. The senior streetworkers are directly supervised by the Streetworker Program Manager who oversees all streetworker initiatives.

The objectives of the Streetworker Program include:

- establishing an informal body among the streetworkers in each zone to facilitate knowledge sharing and trouble shooting
- maintaining a referral and resource system of services for youth
- responding to and intervening in crisis or emergency situations citywide
- establishing communication between the streetworkers and agencies providing services to youth
- maintaining relationships with the Boston Police Department
- providing intensive service to over 2,000 high-risk youth

In addition, school-based streetworkers work in public high schools to assist youth and their families with educational issues, career enhancement and conflict intervention between students and/or administrators.

## **The Boston Strategy to Improve Student Attendance**

Working in cooperation with the Boston School Department and numerous government, non-profit, and faith-based agencies, the Boston Police Department has worked to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to address the problem of truancy in Boston schools. Building upon the city's recent productive efforts to reduce youth violence, this strategy focuses on greater involvement by both students and their families in educational and after-school programs. It also seeks to address issues that typically contribute to repeated absenteeism (such as school safety, drug use, etc.) through a variety of prevention and intervention methods, as well as strengthened enforcement where necessary.

Truancy has been identified by the Boston Police Department (BPD) and Boston Public Schools (BPS) as a significant indicator that a youth is at risk to fail in school and become involved in criminal activity. Truancy sweeps were initiated by BPD and the Boston Public School Department. Youth who are identified on these sweeps receive follow up services from the YMCA of Greater Boston through the Promoting Higher Attendance Team (PHAT). An effort is made to positively engage each youth who is involved in initial contact so that they are more likely to agree to accept services beyond contact. The youth's parents and school are notified in order to verify the information provided by the youth and to make the involvement of the PHAT team known. The emphasis of PHAT is on initiating and coordinating services through communication and collaboration with other agencies (school, police, probation, social service programs, etc.) who may or may not already be involved with the truant youth. The Promoting Higher Attendance Team creates a supportive, caring and professional environment that instills a sense of hope and motivation which will enable students to achieve academic and personal success.

## **Boston Private Industry Council**

The PIC is Boston's Regional Employment Board (REB), the governance and policy-making body for Boston's work force development system. Working with Boston's educational institutions, labor, community-based organizations, prominent businesses and small neighborhood establishments alike, the PIC connects the youth and adults of Boston with careers in the mainstream economy. Focusing on a continuum of education and work force development issues in Boston, the PIC not only provides system-wide strategies but also ensures quality in programs such as Welfare -to-Work, Career Centers and School-to-Career.

School-to-Career programs empower students to develop the cross-functional skills necessary to succeed in school, at work and in life. With the help of area businesses and the Boston Public Schools, the PIC provides the resources necessary to extend the school day and the time spent interacting with adults, improving both the quality of education and productivity at the workplace, both now and in the future.

## **The Boston Jobs Project**

The Jobs Project has evolved from Boston's success over the last three years in controlling youth violence and crime. No single program can claim credit for the dramatic decline in youth homicides and violence that Boston celebrates today. Instead, the partnerships and strategies developed by law enforcement, juvenile justice authorities,

community leaders, streetworkers, clergy and the youth themselves are the reason for the dramatic success.

In Operation Cease Fire, police officers, prosecutors, and probation officers collaborate to target chronic and violent offenders for tough enforcement. They also join with streetworkers, educators, clergy and residents to identify many young people who are searching for ways to turn their lives around. These young people have said, if you are serious about breaking our ties to gangs and drugs, help us get jobs.

Thus the young people themselves have pointed to the next step in Boston's strategy: building a structure for youth to move beyond criminal and negative behaviors into jobs and stability. It is no easy task - these young people are alienated from community, school, church and family. They face an environment lacking in adult role models, a labor market where living wage jobs are out of their reach. and a peer culture that dismisses educational achievement.

The goal of the Jobs Project is to build a bridge to the city's surging economy for these youth who enjoy the fewest advantages and bear the greatest problems. The Jobs Project is built on the concept that a job connects a young person not only to the mainstream economy, but also provides access to education and skill building that will allow him/her to move toward a career goal and self-sustaining income. The ultimate outcome will be declining rates of youth violence and truancy, unemployment and poverty in our communities.

Key components of the project include:

**Outreach and Recruitment:** The Jobs Project targets youth who are most often missed in traditional job programs, and for whom successful involvement is vital to continued crime reduction: youth who have been court involved, but who are ready to make a change in their lives. Law enforcement agencies, in particular, have proven their ability to effectively identify youth. The shared street intelligence used successfully to target prosecutions now will be used to identify youth who are ready to turn their lives around. Streetworkers, clergy, and youth workers will also refer youth to the Jobs Project.

**Job Placement at Work-based Learning:** Youth ready for job placement enroll in the Boston Private Industry Council's intensive three-week job readiness training that addresses work-related issues, including office culture, reliability, job expectations and interviewing and job retention skills.

The PIC, with support from the Mayor, has recruited a network of employers who are hiring youth who complete the job readiness program. Career Specialists monitor the youth through their job readiness program, assist them in securing employment, and stay connected with the youth and their supervisors to assist in resolving work-related issues. In addition, PIC staff work with alternative education providers to connect work-based learning with school-based learning.

**Vouching:** The original source of the referral -- police or probation officer, DYS caseworker, Streetworker, or minister - is informed of the youth's progress, and, along with the Career Specialist, "vouches" for the youth with his/her employer. Vouching means that the referral source offers him/herself to the employer as a resource for the youth. Employers have told us that it is the willingness of the PIC and the referral sources to stand behind the youth that gives them the confidence to

make the hire. Vouching is nothing new - parents, relatives and friends often vouch for youth just starting out in the labor market. The link is created for high risk youth who are otherwise isolated from the informal network of referrals through which many people find their way in the labor market.

**Case Management:** Case Managers assist youth in setting and reaching goals around work, education and personal achievement. They assist youth in overcoming the range of obstacles they face by accessing services such as alternative education, substance abuse services, housing, child care, transportation, family support, and mental health counseling.

**Alternative Education:** Many, if not most, of the youth appropriate for the Jobs Project have either dropped out of school or are chronically truant. It is essential for these youth to continue their education as they participate in the job readiness and placement program at the PIC. From demographic studies, it is known that without a high school credential at a minimum, it is virtually impossible to break out of the low wage, low skilled labor market. Experience shows that an out-of-school youth looking for a job is more likely to succeed if he/she re-engages in education at the same time as participating in the PIC program.

Boston has a network of more than a dozen community-based alternative education programs offering education leading to a GED or a high school diploma. The network currently serves a total of one thousand students and is subscribed to capacity. The Jobs Project, will access resources to expand the alternative education network.

The Boston Jobs project is led by the Mayor, Police Commissioner, US Attorney, Suffolk County District Attorney and the Attorney General.

Other key players in the Jobs Project include the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), the business community, Boston Community Centers, the Mayor's Office of Jobs & Community Services, the Boston Housing Authority, the Department of Youth Services, the Commissioner of Probation, community-based organizations and ministries, including the Ten Point Coalition, Streetworkers, the Regional Department of Labor, and the Program in Criminal Justice Policy Management at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

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For more information, please visit the website:

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