

# Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

*Representatives from five UNITY cities participated in the panel discussion “Prevention Works: UNITY City Network members from around the country share their successful local efforts.” The panel was moderated by Neil Rainford of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and was part of The California Wellness Foundation’s Conference on Violence Prevention held in October 2010, in Los Angeles. The following narrative is excerpted from remarks by Mariko Lockhart about the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.*

## Impetus to Prevent Violence

In 2008, five youth were shot and killed by other youth in Seattle. The community was outraged and demanded a response. While Seattle’s youth homicide rate is not high compared to other cities of its size, the city is fortunate to have a low community tolerance for violence. This has been the impetus to mobilize and invest in a comprehensive strategy to address the problem.

Rates for other types of crime were at all-time lows when these deaths occurred, but levels of youth violence were static. The mayor said, “Clearly, what we’ve been doing has not been working; we need to do something different.” After gathering community input and researching evidence-based strategies that had successfully reduced youth violence in other cities, the City of Seattle created what is now the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.

We officially launched the Initiative in July 2009, and the city has made a significant investment of approximately \$4 million a year through its general fund. Seattle had a strong prevention component already in place; the city invests approximately \$62 million a year in services for children and youth, such as early learning, family support workers, and school-based health clinics in almost all of our middle and high schools. To supplement the prevention component, the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative invests significant resources in intervention. By expanding enrollment to youth in middle school, the Initiative focuses both prevention and intervention efforts on a younger population than ever before in Seattle.



**Mariko Lockhart** directs the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, a comprehensive community-based strategy to reduce and prevent youth violence in the areas of the city most affected. Mariko is an experienced non-profit executive, consultant, facilitator and trainer with a strong track record leading public-private community collaborations to benefit disadvantaged populations. As a recent past president and state director of Communities In Schools of New Jersey (CISNJ), she was responsible for the management and operations of the state-wide dropout prevention organization. During her tenure at CISNJ, she established four independent affiliate organizations in high-need school districts. Mariko has significant experience in working with diverse communities and coordinated the broad-based citywide public planning effort to set education goals for the City of Newark’s successful application for federal designation as an Enterprise Community.

Mariko is a magna cum laude graduate of Yale University and holds a master’s degree in Public Administration from New York University’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Mariko also completed leadership seminars at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management and the Aspen Institute’s Community Roundtable on Racial Equity and Youth Development.

## Community-Based Networks

A major change in how the city addresses youth violence is the establishment of community-based Neighborhood Networks that are hubs for connecting youth to needed services. In planning the Initiative, one message we heard loud and clear—both in Seattle and in our research of other cities—was that our plan had to be community-led and community-driven to be successful. The designers of the Initiative took this wise advice to heart. In the resulting neighborhood-based structure, community organizations offer support to youth at risk of violence, and provide ongoing follow-up to ensure the youth are truly getting the resources they need.

This design is perfectly suited to Seattle because it allows for the Neighborhood Networks to tailor their approach to the needs and characteristics of the communities. While important practices and procedures are the same across Networks, the methods for engaging and mobilizing the community differ by neighborhood.

To identify which neighborhoods were most affected and where we would focus our efforts, we looked at data on indicators of future violent behavior, such as on shootings, juvenile violent crime, truancy and school disciplinary action. We identified three focus neighborhoods: central, southeast and southwest Seattle. The community agencies in each of the neighborhoods are the leads. People in the community, schools and service providers are coming to know that the three neighborhood coordinating agencies—Therapeutic Health Services,\* Boys and Girls Club, and Southwest Youth & Family Services—are the places to connect youth to services, to help them change their life path. These agencies do an assessment and identify the best combination of services for that young person. It is all voluntary; the youth must want to make that change and sign up for the services.

We use a collaborative approach. Other partnering city agencies include:

- Parks and Recreation, which is opening up community centers until the wee hours of the morning with programming for youth in those three neighborhoods.
- Human Services, which manages contracts for services that we're providing in case management, mentoring, Aggression Replacement Training (A.R.T.), and some funding for grassroots organizations providing services to our most at-risk youth.
- Department of Neighborhoods provided small matching grants which we're now managing through the Initiative directly. These are for small grassroots groups that can't compete for larger grants. They can receive matching grants of up to \$20,000.
- The Seattle Police Department provides four officers whose focus is conflict resolution and mentoring at middle schools. They also visit homes and mediate disputes.

---

\* Effective January 2011.

## STRATEGIES & PARTNERSHIPS

The Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative blends multiple strategies, such as promoting community organization, law enforcement, and providing young people in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence with needed social services and employment opportunities. Agreements with robust community agencies and various city departments create a safety net of coordinated partners, all whom are invested in the Initiative and accountable for specific outcomes. This collaborative approach also promotes data sharing and leverages community resources to maximize success.

All contracts with the services providers are performance based; there are indicators that we expect our service provider partners to meet, and everyone is very interdependent. It's a new way to work that breaks down silos and really requires everyone to communicate with each other.

## Measuring Outcomes

It was very important to have measurable outcomes so we would actually be able to see an impact on the levels of violence. Homicide was not a good indicator because that's not common in Seattle among youth, so the two things that we are looking at are a reduction in juvenile court referral for violence, and a reduction in middle school expulsions and suspensions for violence.

We wanted to be able to measure our success, so we chose a narrow focus population. To be eligible for services through the initiative, youth must be between the ages of 12 and 17, they have to either live or go to school in one of the three neighborhoods we identified, and also meet one of the following criteria:

- Youth who have been arrested or convicted of a violent offense, and are considered at risk for continued violence.
- Middle school youth who have either high truancy, which is a risk [factor] for violence, or those who have suspensions or expulsions.
- Youth who have been victims of violence and are at risk for retaliatory violence.

We are also assessing our data all along the way from the youth that we're serving and from our service providers which we use for course correction. The Initiative was designed to serve 800, and currently we're serving over 1,000 youth. Youth keep getting referred to us and no one has wanted to create a waiting list, so we're starting to do even more collaborative planning to leverage community resources and partnerships.

**Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY)** builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs, so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with ample opportunities and supportive relationships. A Prevention Institute initiative, UNITY is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the CDC's national youth violence prevention initiative, Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE), and in part by The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness, education, and disease prevention programs.

For more information, visit [www.preventioninstitute.org/unity](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/unity).

## SERVICES UPDATE

In just over one year, the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative enrolled more than 1,000 youth, case-managed more than 500, and for summer 2010 placed 275 young people in either community service opportunities, internships or provided employment services. Nearly 150 youth have participated in city recreation programs, and the Initiative has matched 86 young people with mentors.

*"Our partnership with UNITY has allowed us to do a much more robust evaluation than we were able to do just on our own."*

— MARIKO LOCKHART  
DIRECTOR, SEATTLE YOUTH  
VIOLENCE PREVENTION  
INITIATIVE