

Understanding Youth Violence Using African American Traditions

Background

As urban communities continue to respond to economic and social challenges, nonprofits work to have a positive impact on the central city. Milwaukee, like many cities, has tried many approaches and continues to search for the right strategies. Often, however, the key role that nonprofits of color, especially small organizations, can play in community building is often overlooked, underestimated and underutilized. As resources decrease, the need for diverse organizations to work effectively together is critical.

Goal

Use a community-based participatory research process to assess the views of Milwaukee African American youth and adults regarding youth violence with a longer term goal of identifying the attributes of African American community organizations that can help Milwaukee decrease youth violence.

Methods

Qualitative interviews with African American youth and adults

Conclusions from the Interviews

The youth:

- Are very perceptive of negative attitudes others have of African-Americans;
- Perceive suppression by others as contributing to the limited access of some African-Americans in several areas, including education, politics, and the economy;
- Have internalized these stereotypes and also accuse African Americans of

being lazy, not trying hard enough, and acting foolish;

- Are aware of the negative effects drugs have on their families and community;
- May see others as not caring or being hopeless, but they still maintain a level of hope and caring; Provide examples of how to constructively deal with anger before it becomes unmanageable.
- Seem overall hopeful, based on their ability to identify alternatives to violence.

The adults:

- Emphasized the importance of religion as the foundation of African American life. They contribute the problem of youth violence to the breakdown of this foundation;
- Discussed the influence of parents and home life on youth and the need for more involved parenting;

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- Encouraged the use of positive role models to model appropriate behavior for the youth;
- Suggested partnerships between religious organizations, schools and communities as a solution to youth violence.

Summary

Both youth and adults are cognizant of the destructive effects of violence on their community and suggested respectful and equal partnerships between youth and adults as central to the solution.

Next Steps

The Social Development Commission and the Center for Urban Population Health are exploring opportunities to engage youth and adults in an intergenerational assessment of community strengths. This assessment will provide a solid foundation to identify, develop, and implement programs to improve the health of the community. The primary intervention would consist of a photovoice project whereby youths and adults will photograph and write about strengths, or assets, in their community and share their images and text with each other.

Academic Accomplishments

Dunbar, E., Bergstrom, J. (2008). Building effective community partnerships to address youth violence using African American Traditions. *2008 Public Health Partners Conference*. Madison, WI (July 23).

Cisler, R.A., Bergstrom, J., Dunbar, E. & Blanks, D. (2007). Building effective community partnerships using African American traditions: Understanding youth violence. *Nonprofit Research Colloquium: Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management*. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, WI (February 7).

Key Partner Organizations/Project Leadership

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Greater Galilee Missionary Baptist Church

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