



CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY

ASSESSING NEW YORK CITY'S YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE CRISIS: CREWS

VOLUME III

RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM COORDINATING A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

BY STEPHANIE UEBERALL & ASHLEY CANNON



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The success or failure of community strategies to address the youth gun violence crisis is often attributed in part to how well the problem is understood and diagnosed.¹ With support from The New York Community Trust, the Crime Commission has undertaken an analysis of youth gun violence and crew activity – violent turf rivalries among less-organized, smaller and normally younger groups than traditional gangs – in select New York City communities. Our initial findings from available data, existing research, and interviews with stakeholders are presented in a series of papers titled, “Assessing New York City’s Youth Gun Violence Crisis: Crews”.

New York City has famously experienced unprecedented, sustained reductions in crime over the last 25 years.² Areas once so dangerous that they resembled foreign war zones now are home to some of the most desirable real estate in the country. We proudly and rightfully point to our success, calling ourselves the “safest big city in America”.³ But there are places and people that have been left behind. There are areas which have not seen violent crime rates drop to nearly zero – as others have – or anywhere close. Certain races and age groups are also still far more likely to become victims and be responsible for violent crime than others.

The root causes of violent crime have not changed either—and the circumstances under which crime is committed sound eerily familiar to the high-crime New York of 25 years ago that we now refer to as the “bad old days”. Therefore, in order to make real strides in improving the quality of life amongst these persistently hardest-hit groups, we must address the root causes of why youth become involved in gun violence and crews.

The NYPD publically acknowledged that youth “gangs” are becoming more organized and more violent,⁴ finding that more than a third of all shootings in New York City now involve what the NYPD calls “crews”.⁵ In order to truly identify how youth are involved in organized activity (gangs, crews, etc.) and gun violence, the Crime Commission researched legal and intelligence definitions and conducted fieldwork with community residents, service providers, and policymakers which revealed three broad categories of organization:

TRADITIONAL GANGS

Groups that have clear hierarchy, structure, organization, rules of conduct and are profit-motivated, usually affiliating with national gangs such as the Bloods.

CREWSⁱ

Fluid groups formed based on where members live, such as a building or block, creating violent turf rivalries. Crews generally do not have clear hierarchy, structure, or rules, and are usually not profit-motivated.

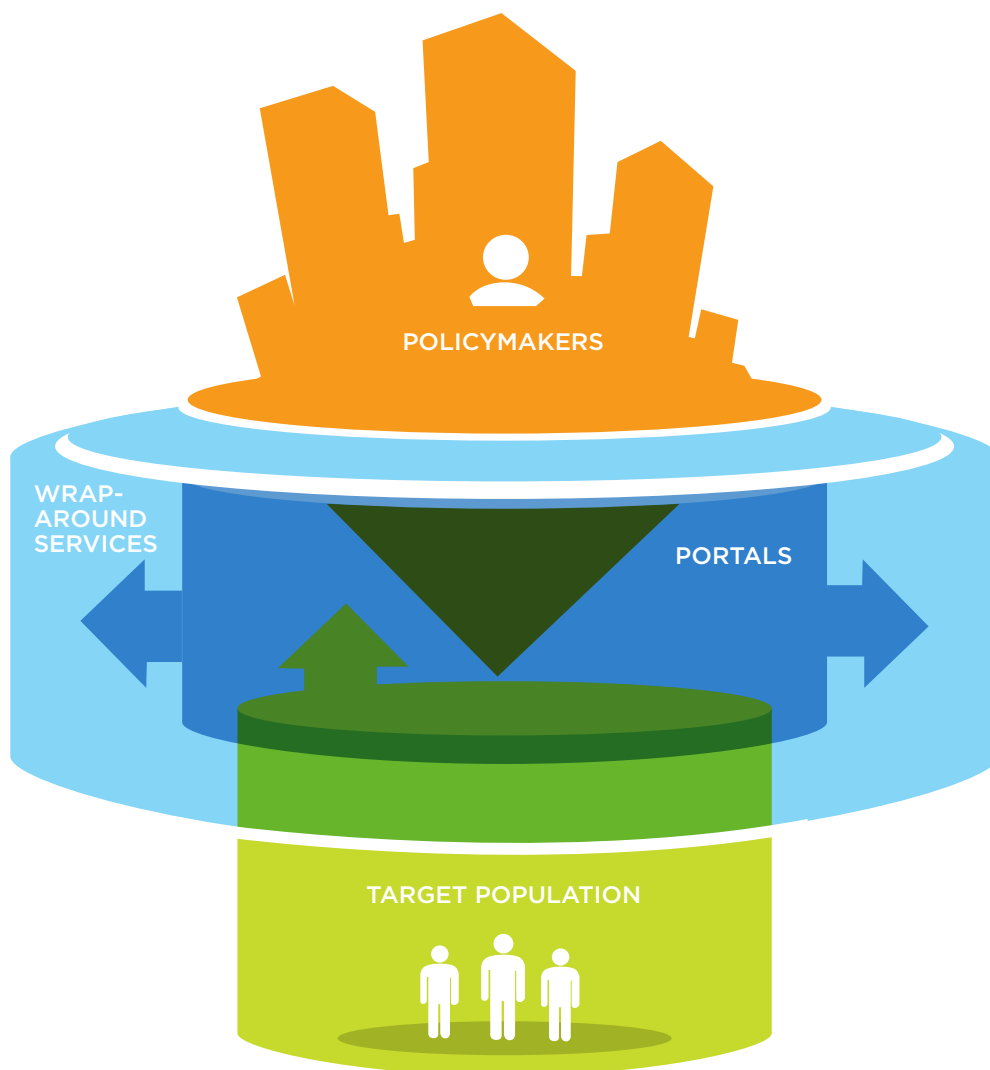
GROUPS

Unorganized groups, often temporal in nature, which form as a result of interpersonal conflicts.

This research and fieldwork demonstrated that crews – and not traditional, hierarchical gangs – are a major part of violent crime statistics and analysis. Crews actually account for a great deal of youth criminal activity, especially violent crime—and without proper interventions for this type of activity, we will not be able to adequately address what has been a persistent public safety and criminal justice issue for New York City.

In order to develop more effective responses to crews it is essential for stakeholders to acknowledge the victimization of those involved, understand their underlying needs, and identify the neighborhood conditions that impact them.

i. Crews form working relationships with other crews, known as sets. Sometimes crew members also affiliate with a citywide set (Young Guns (YG) or Young Bosses (YB)) for recognition when traveling outside of their neighborhood.



POLICYMAKERS

- Elected Officials
- Government Agencies
- Advocates
- Philanthropies

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

- Legal
- Education
- Job Readiness & Training
- Employment
- Mental Health
- Substance Use

PORTALS

- Street Outreach
- Violence Interruption
- Conflict Mediation
- Hospital Responders
- Educational Workshops
- Community Mobilization
- Public Education
- Youth Development
- Peer Leadership

TARGET POPULATION

- Youth Engaged in Crews and Violence
- Peers
- Family
- Community Members

Although there have been significant recent investments by policymakers and funders – ranging from organizing task forces and work groups, to deploying new law enforcement strategies, to implementing programmatic interventions – New York City’s ability to fully understand and diagnose its crew problem is hindered by a lack of data and coordination.

While the NYPD collects data on crew members and related criminal activity, law enforcement data are typically insufficient to inform comprehensive responses because it is collected for the purpose of informing suppression and investigation strategies.⁶ At the same time, community-based organizations collect a range of data about the underlying needs of the individuals involved, but often lack the capacity to analyze and communicate these data to inform policy and programming decisions. Further, the City lacks a collaborative effort among stakeholders dedicated to addressing this problem.

Preventing crew violence cannot be accomplished by a single agency or organization. Effective solutions require the combination of insight, hard work, and dedication from a wide variety of organizations and stakeholders. New York City should immediately mobilize stakeholders to take steps toward developing a comprehensive strategy to address the city’s crew violence problem.

THE CRIME COMMISSION'S ASSESSMENT OFFERS THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

IMPLEMENT A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH:

- Deliver and sustain adequate services to prevent crew violence.
 - Develop funding strategies that promote stability and consistent service delivery, and thus situate providers in a position to succeed.
- Better track the risks, needs, victimizations, and activities of youth involved in crews, as well as the conditions impacting them by harnessing the wealth of knowledge possessed by stakeholders.
- Facilitate a collaborative effort among stakeholders to minimize the duplication of efforts and maximize the use of resources available to selected needs.

BETTER COLLECT AND SHARE DATA:

- Share aggregated data on crews between government agencies and citizens.
 - Request the NYPD to report crew-related crimes as part the Mayor's Management Report and/or weekly CompStat reports.
 - Create information-sharing forums both within and across stakeholder groups (e.g., government, community-based organizations, youth) in order to share insights and identify effective prevention and intervention strategies.
- Build the capacity of community-based organizations.
 - Support must be provided to community-based organizations for internal capacity building by instituting a civilian CompStat-like data management system for violence prevention programs.
 - Strengthen inter-organization collaboration to facilitate the integration of resources and responses.

COORDINATE A CONTINUUM OF INTERVENTIONS:

- Incorporate programs that have different points of contact with youth at each developmental milestone.
 - Government must invest in locally accessible interventions that focus on education and vocational skills, address victimization, trauma and grief, and emphasize the role of the family and community.

As youth develop their identity, set goals, and plan for their future they stop committing crime.⁷ By implementing these suggestions, the city can build comprehensive strategies that reduce crew violence and make our communities safer.⁸

VOLUME III

RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

COORDINATING A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

BY STEPHANIE UEBERALL & ASHLEY CANNON

Defining the extent of New York City's crew problem, creating a system for analyzing it, and devising effective interventions are only helpful if services to prevent violence are delivered and sustained. Yet there is inadequate support from the government and the private sector for organizations that actually provide the services that get results—and a lack of coordination amongst the organizations themselves.

We know that crew violence has been of increasing concern among residents and policymakers in New York City. Research shows that there are fundamental differences between youth and adults that engage in crime. In response, over the last several years, policymakers and funders have made significant investments. Responses ranged from organizing task forces and work groupsⁱ, to deploying new law enforcement strategiesⁱⁱ, to implementing programmatic interventionsⁱⁱⁱ (see *exhibit 1*). These responses are already proving successful, with historically high-crime neighborhoods like Central Harlem seeing dramatic reductions in murders and shootings.¹

EXHIBIT 2: Elements of Effective Continuums

- *Collaboration*
- *Locally Accessible Services*
- *Access to Youth and Creation of Portals into Services*
- *Assessing Needs*
- *Managing Referrals*
- *Building and Maintaining Trust*
- *Sustainable Long-Term Funding*
- *Clearly Defined Roles*

With many of these interventions already in operation and more being implemented, we must ensure they are situated in a position to succeed. They must be sponsored and available to all high-risk youth to yield the best results. If these elements are not in place, communities endure tragic results: organizations report increases in shootings and violence when budget and resource cuts require them to scale back services.²

When combining all of these efforts into a comprehensive strategy, ensuring continuity of services should be at the core of responding to the problem—a response that must be rooted in community partnerships.

Preventing crew violence cannot be accomplished by a single agency—effective solutions require the combination of insight, hard work, and dedication from a wide variety of organizations and stakeholders. Therefore, strengthening inter-organization collaboration is necessary to facilitate the integration of resources and responses. By building partnerships and sharing information communities can increase their capacity to develop, implement, and assess strategies to prevent violence among youth³ (see *exhibit 2*).

EXHIBIT 1: Programmatic Interventions

- *Street Outreach*
- *Violence Interruption*
- *Conflict Mediation*
- *Hospital Responders*
- *Educational Workshops*
- *Community Mobilization*
- *Public Education*
- *Youth Development*
(talent shows; sports; after-school activities)
- *Peer Leadership*
- *Wrap-Around Services*
(legal; education; job readiness & training; mental health; substance use)

i. The Crime Commission's Youth Violence Prevention Work Group, New York City Council's Gun Violence Task Force

ii. NYPD's Operation Crew Cut

iii. Operation SNUG, NYC Young Men's Initiative

The following is a detailed assessment of the target population, effective programs and interventions that already exist, and what is necessary to create a successful and comprehensive continuum of services to help high-risk youth leave a life of violence behind.

TARGET POPULATION: YOUTH ENGAGED IN CREWS & VIOLENCE

Researchers have found that criminal offending increases during the teenage years, peaking at about age 17 (slightly younger for nonviolent crimes and slightly older for violent crimes).⁴ Despite the frequency of crimes committed by individual youths during adolescence, research has consistently shown a dramatic decrease in the number of crimes committed after adolescence.⁵ Thus, youth who engage in criminal activity, including violence, are not necessarily on the track to become repeat adult offenders.⁶ In fact, only a small percentage (approximately 5-10%) of youth who engage in crime become chronic offenders, continuing criminal activity into adulthood, because youth are highly responsive to interventions.⁷

This period of increased criminal activity is often attributed to the cognitive and psychosocial developmental changes that occur during adolescence, which make youth more vulnerable to external influence, more impulsive, and less self-disciplined.⁸ With this combination of factors present in youth, it is not surprising that researchers have found that most delinquent behavior is a group activity.⁹

Developing a peer group is an important and healthy process in every youth's development, as it provides youth with a reference point for developing a sense of identity.¹⁰ Adolescence is the first time in the developmental process when a person possesses the cognitive capacity to sort through who they are and what makes them unique. This process involves testing methods on how to cope with stress, manage emotions, and relate to others.¹¹ As youth seek to define their self-concept, self-worth, and identity, they utilize a trial and error approach experimenting with different appearances, behaviors, and peer groups.¹² Often, youth who end up engaging in crews have struggled during this stage of development, and, as a result, have developed maladapted techniques to cope and connect with others. Youth who remain in crews for longer periods than others typically share personality and behavior traits with other members, "including aggressiveness, oppositional behavior, inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and maintaining relationships with antisocial peers."¹³

While we know not all peer groups engage in criminal activity and groups that do engage in criminal activity are not all considered crews^{iv}, it is important to understand the contextual factors that influence cognitive and psychosocial development (including family and community factors). Crews are more prevalent in communities where there are high levels of poverty and crime, and where educational and vocational opportunities are limited. Such community conditions can create antisocial community norms (i.e., rationalizations for crime and drug use, negative attitude towards the law). These factors combined with youth who feel unsafe in their communities contribute to a positive view of crews and normalization of violence.¹⁴

In sum, youth involved in crews have unique reasons for joining, which are affected by cognitive and psychosocial developmental changes and environmental factors (such as family, neighborhood, school, and peers, among others).¹⁵ Youth exhibit a wide range of symptoms and needs,¹⁶ and require individualized responses to their unique needs and circumstances.¹⁷

iv. See volume I of series "Defining the Problem: Crews and Gun Violence"

CURRENT PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM

Generally, the programmatic responses implemented to prevent and intervene in violence seek to address risk factors including: antisocial personality patterns; procriminal attitudes; social supports for crime; substance use; poor family and marital relationships; low performance/satisfaction at school and work; and lack of involvement in prosocial recreational activities.¹⁸ Given this broad range of factors to address, programmatic interventions are implemented in a variety of settings including in schools and in the community. By utilizing multiple settings, interventions are able to reach both youth involved in violence and the broader community, as well as target factors at various developmental stages. For example, some violence prevention programs meet disconnected youth on the street, whereas school-based interventions access youth enrolled in school, and community development organizations have contact with a broad range of youth.

To address the above risk factors, organizations throughout New York City have adopted various program components that seek to engage youth at varying stages in their development. Common elements and goals include:

Street Outreach

Participant outreach is performed on the street, aiming to recruit youth engaged in shootings seeking out both victims and shooters (as youth involved in violence often fall into both categories). Street Outreach is strengthened by employing credible messengers^v who have “lived the life” as outreach workers. Based on their life experience, a Street Outreach Worker (OW) can genuinely tell youth “I have been there and you don’t have to do this.” This gives them credibility and facilitates trust between the OW and the youth. This also provides the OW the opportunity to identify the participant’s underlying needs and problematic thoughts that heighten their risk for violence, and then the OW can provide alternative solutions to stressful situations and connect the youth to the appropriate services to help them become a healthy, productive, and contributing citizen.¹⁹ Ultimately, Street Outreach seeks to facilitate behavior modeling through the use of mentors and also seeks to connect youth to needed services.

Violence Interruption

Public health approaches view violence as a disease, treating it as a behavior that is a learned response which is modeled and copied.²⁰ Often one shooting leads to another, creating a cycle of continued violence and further perpetuates a casual attitude toward violence.²¹ Therefore, if one incident can be diffused there will not be grounds for retaliation, thus breaking the cycle of violence related to that conflict.²² Programs utilize a combination of violence interruption and conflict mediation to disrupt fights and diffuse conflicts. Since behaviors are learned, staff encourage youth to consider a broad range of responses to a situation, especially as much of this violence is based on small disrespects to one’s character or reputation, such as looking at someone’s girlfriend or being on the wrong side of a block. Violence Interrupters (VI) are deployed to the streets at night to look for situations that might produce violence and when violence occurs, they literally step in-between the groups in conflict.²³ These VIs are also credible messengers who have influence over people in the community. The employment of credible messengers as VIs facilitates the ability to maintain awareness of and stop any impending violence. The purpose of this strategy is to provide on-the-spot alternatives to violence to cool-down conflicts, and to provide youth with the skills to respond to and deescalate conflicts.²⁴ These decision alternatives are often negotiated, situation-specific, tangible options for youth involved in a conflict. For example, staff may ridicule the stupidity of gun violence to resolve trivial matters, promote truces, negotiate payment of fines, or as a last resort, encourage youth to use physical violence instead of using a gun.²⁵

v. For the purposes of the anti-violence interventions, a “credible messenger” is someone with street credibility, is respected in the community, and has influence over people engaging in violence.

Conflict Mediation

Conflict mediation seeks to resolve arguments and disputes that may lead to violence, and reconcile conflicts that have lingered after a fight or violent act has occurred. Conflict mediation brings people in conflict together to resolve the dispute through mutually acceptable agreements. This process is facilitated by an impartial party, which creates a forum where both sides can be heard. These efforts also provide youth with the skills they need to respond to and deescalate conflicts of all kinds. Conflict mediation is implemented in multiple settings (including in schools or on the street as part of violence interruption).²⁶

Hospital Responders

In efforts to stop retaliation, programs deploy Responders to hospitals to provide support and conflict mediation to victims of penetrating trauma such as stabbings, shootings, and severe beatings. The Hospital Responders are also credible messengers that aim to engage the victim, as well as family and friends, and at times the perpetrator in the emergency room.²⁷ This component is crucial as often family and friends are emotional after a loved one has been attacked, which can lead to violent retaliation. Upon connecting with the victim, the Hospital Responder will assess the likelihood of retaliation and provide the victim with referrals to resources such as an Outreach Worker, shelter, counseling, legal services, and more.²⁸

Educational Workshops

Educational workshops aim to provide youth with information, tools, and skills to troubleshoot everyday situations and resolve conflicts peacefully. Workshops are often facilitated by credible messengers, and may cover topics such as gangs and crews, anger management, bullying, interpersonal teen violence, obesity, digital storytelling, HIV/AIDS and STD awareness, and drug abuse.²⁹

Community Mobilization

Community mobilization is a common public health strategy that involves residents, local businesses, elected officials, clergy, and community groups to promote prosocial norms.³⁰ Social norms are the beliefs, attitudes, and values that make up the culture of a community, defining what behavior is and is not acceptable.³¹ This strategy aims to encourage a discussion around what is and what is not acceptable concerning violence in a community.³² Anti-violence organizations mobilize the community by holding marches, rallies, community talks, and vigils in the community where they seek to spread the message of “stop the shooting” to the wider community.³³ Within 48 hours of a shooting, the community is mobilized. Staff go door-to-door spreading the word about the shooting and the needed response from the community. These efforts are made to display the community’s outrage to such a horrible event, reinforce community norms against violence, and remind individuals that they can take positive, collective action against crime in their community.³⁴

Public Education

Public education is used as a method to change norms, to increase awareness of the emotional and financial costs of violence to individuals and the community, and to increase awareness of available programs and services. Staff distribute materials—flyers, posters, buttons, key chains—in large volumes when canvassing the catchment area, mobilizing the community for a shooting response, and during the actual response itself.³⁵

Youth Development: Talent Shows, Sports, and After-School Activities

Youth development recreational activities seek to increase opportunities for youth to interact in a prosocial setting. These activities can also be used as a means to decrease tensions among youth. For example, basketball and other sports tournaments are set up to bring rival youth together to humanize the other side and create new opportunities for positive experiences with each other. Talent shows promote youths’ abilities and simultaneously engage the community in a positive event, providing the opportunity to educate the community about current anti-violence efforts and how they can get involved.³⁶ These events supplement after-school programs, where youth are engaged in prosocial activities on a daily basis. Recreational activities focus on youths’ strengths instead of their negative risk factors, giving the chance for participants to feel they have something positive to offer to the community. Research consistently demonstrates that

prosocial activities reduce the amount of time youth have to engage in deviant behaviors, promote health-enhancing behaviors, such as physical activity, diet, sleep, and safety practices, and provide the structure youth need for positive development.³⁷

Peer Leadership

Peer leaders serve a variety of functions, such as role models, personal support, resource agents, and learning coaches.³⁸ Youth are provided the tools they need to become peer leaders through trainings in areas such as group facilitation, advocacy, public speaking, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. These skills allow them to promote anti-violence norms in peer interactions and workshops for other youth. Peer leaders are typically recruited from various backgrounds, including those involved in violence and those that are not, in order to maximize their reach. This facilitates the dissemination of information across a broader audience of youth. Further, engaging youth that are involved in violence as peer leaders creates an opportunity for them to become highly invested and involved in their community, and positions them to gain meaningful educational and personal benefits, including an enhanced sense of belonging in a prosocial group.³⁹

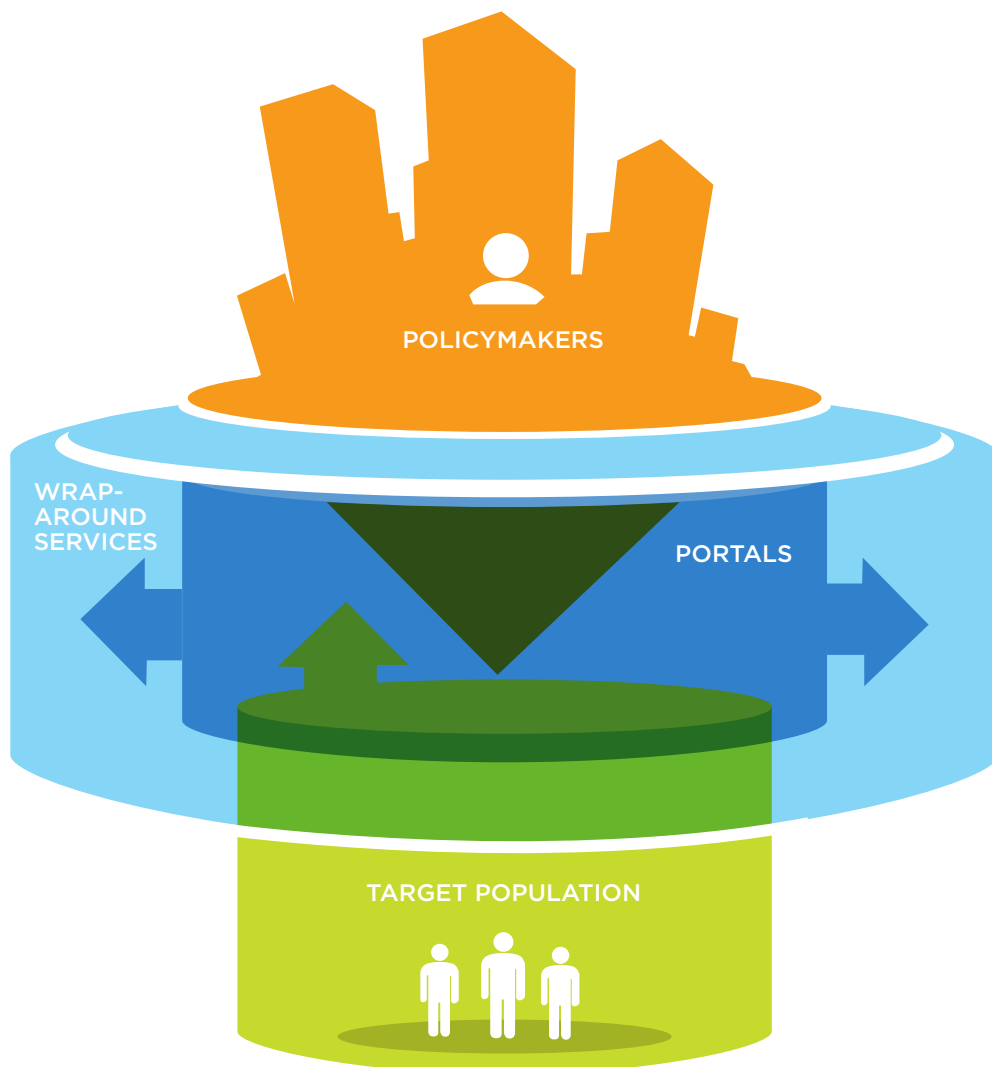
Wrap-Around Services

In efforts to meet youth needs holistically, service providers have included program components that are not solely anti-violence mechanisms but aim to serve the underlying needs of youth involved in crews and violence. Wrap-around services are also implemented to serve family members and the family as a whole.

- **Legal:** This component aims to assist families and youth navigate legal issues and provide support by coordinating needed government services. Examples of legal services include criminal defense, immigration, education and housing issues (including safety transfers), know your rights training, and advice on how to handle encounters with law enforcement (including encounters prompted by shooting investigations).⁴⁰
- **Education:** Many youth engaged in crews are not in school and may have learning disabilities. As employment is known to decrease criminal behavior, acquiring education is an important step towards employment opportunities and away from crime. Programs offer tutoring and educational programming to help youth return to school or acquire a high school equivalency diploma.
- **Job Readiness & Training:** Youth involved in violence typically have a range of barriers to employment, including criminal records and/or limited employment experience. In order to prepare youth for meaningful and long-term employment, programs teach soft skills (e.g., communication, enthusiasm/attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving/critical thinking, timeliness)⁴¹ and provide youth with opportunities for vocational skills training, education, and literacy support.⁴²
- **Mental Health:** Providing access to mental health services for youth is critically important because the first signs of many mental illnesses begin to appear during the teenage years.⁴³ In addition, witnessing or being the victim of violence at home or in the community can be traumatic, create symptoms (e.g., problems sleeping, anxiety, aggression), and exacerbate existing mental illness.⁴⁴ Moreover, delayed or untreated mental illness can lead to more severe illness, requiring higher levels of treatment and care.⁴⁵ The goal of providing mental health services to victims, shooters, and friends and families affected by violence is to provide preventative care and coping skills.⁴⁶
- **Substance Use:** Substance use is often a driver of violence and a barrier to employment. For example, youth may commit robberies to obtain money for drugs. In addition, many companies require drug testing as a condition of employment. Drug rehabilitation services seek to both reduce crime and reduce barriers to employment.

Each intervention plays an important role in preventing violence and is necessary to create multiple points of contact at which programs can access youth at varying stages of development.

CHART 1: CONTINUUM OF SERVICES



POLICYMAKERS

- Elected Officials
- Government Agencies
- Advocates
- Philanthropies

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

- Legal
- Education
- Job Readiness & Training
- Employment
- Mental Health
- Substance Use

PORTALS

- Street Outreach
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TARGET POPULATION

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- Family
- Community Members

COORDINATING A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

The above programmatic efforts to prevent and intervene in violence are implemented by numerous stakeholders and all of their expertise and hard work is valuable and needed.⁴⁷ Each stakeholder serves an important role in addressing this problem and therefore should be viewed as part of a continuum of interventions. Coordinating an effective and efficient continuum of services requires incorporating stakeholders that have different points of contact with youth at each developmental milestone.⁴⁸ This is especially important as longitudinal studies repeatedly show problem behaviors change in form and function over the course of adolescence.⁴⁹ For example, youth who identify with deviant peer groups often present symptoms (e.g., aggression, anxiety, depression, delinquency, risk-taking) during early adolescence, which lead to adaptive failures, exacerbating their symptoms and antisocial behaviors.⁵⁰ Moreover, it is suggested that crew involvement is by far the most harmful developmental milestone in the escalation of problem behavior into violence.⁵¹ For this reason, stakeholders from a variety of settings need to inform decision-making and work together to deliver the best services and policies for youth.

By organizing interventions along a continuum, stakeholders can contribute their knowledge and point of view in a broader context, facilitating a better understanding of the problem.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE CONTINUUMS

As stakeholders and organizations seek to create a continuum of services, in addition to resources such as staff, time, and expertise, to be effective they need: *a positive attitude toward collaboration; locally accessible services; processes to access youth, assess their needs, and manage referrals; strategies to build and maintain trust with their clients; sustainable long-term funding; and clearly defined roles.*⁵² Decision-makers should support partnership and network building activities and prioritize these elements in policy and program development efforts.

Collaboration

Among organizations and stakeholders working to prevent and intervene in violence, collaboration is essential because it increases the ability to improve the lives of youth more efficiently and effectively. When organizations across and within fields work together to meet goals, the benefits are numerous, including increased communication, more informed programming and policymaking, maximized resources and influence, and shared responsibility. Moreover, collaboration can help to minimize the duplication of services, opening up resources for additional efforts and services.⁵³

Locally Accessible Services

Community-based organizations providing services to youth engaged in violence regularly report the need for services to be present in the community, as crew-involved youth cannot safely travel within their community due to territory rivalries in the surrounding blocks of their homes. To illustrate the severity of this situation, one organization reported a youth from a particular housing development would not go to the pizzeria on the corner, even if paid one hundred dollars, because it is located in rival territory and consequences would surely be carried out for such a visible act of disrespect. In addition to the rivalries, public transportation is often inadequate—youth report having to take multiple buses and/or subway trains, traveling one-and-a-half to two hours to get to service providers. The combination of these factors creates significant barriers to receiving services. To overcome these obstacles, wrap-around service providers aiming to meet this population's needs should either send staff to or open offices in high-need communities. Service providers outside the community can create partnerships with community-based organizations to share resources, such as office space and referrals, to meet a common goal of serving the same population. This collaboration and local access to services will ultimately provide youth the opportunity to receive the primary essential services they need to develop and obtain the foundation level skills necessary to be healthy, productive, contributing citizens.

Access to Youth and Creation of Portals into Services

Bringing services to the community is especially helpful as violence prevention programs seek to reach disconnected youth who other institutions have trouble accessing. The employment of credible messengers who live in the community facilitates unique access to this population. Although the organizations that use this strategy are effective at reaching this population, they often do not have the capacity to provide all of the additional wrap-around services in-house to meet participants' needs. For example, most youth involved in crews have multiple presenting needs and symptoms, ranging from homelessness to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁵⁴ By including these organizations in a continuum of services, they could serve as an entryway or portal into other services, such as mental health, substance use, legal, housing, employment, and education. Therefore, building partnerships and networks would enhance these organizations' abilities to meet youth needs more holistically.

Assessing Needs

In order for service providers to develop meaningful partnerships and networks, they must first understand the needs of the population they aim to serve. To enhance service providers' abilities to coordinate services, program staff often need case management, clinical, and other relevant training to help identify participants' needs and appropriate referral options. Staff can then apply this knowledge to the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected. As service providers build upon their data collection and analysis capacities^{vi} their abilities to identify and communicate youth needs and trends will be increased, allowing them to build partnerships and networks with appropriate service providers, meet additional youth needs, maximize resources, and ultimately improve program performance.

vi. See volume II of series "CompStat For Violence Prevention Programs"

Managing Referrals

In order for community-based organizations to create a sustainable network, they must maintain a referral process. This will allow them to collect the specific information they need for additional service providers, coordinate appointments for youth, ensure follow-up occurs, and receive feedback from youth and providers on the quality and appropriateness of referrals. Further, maintaining a specific protocol for making a referral will help build professional relationships between agencies, as the structure will provide consistency and ease the exchange of information between organizations.⁵⁵ It is important to factor in that each organization along the continuum will learn about youths' needs in different ways. For example, some organizations might implement a thorough intake process during the initial phase of enrollment, while others may learn about needs over time. Regardless of when information is acquired, staff should be able to consult a protocol and easily refer youth to the needed services throughout their participation in the program.

Referral protocols should include any qualifying information required from each service provider.⁵⁶ For example, mental health service providers usually have eligibility criteria, which participants must meet to qualify for a specific program or service. This information is especially important for organizations that are working with violent youth, as a history of violence is an exclusionary criterion for some services. In order to make appropriate referrals, staff should have access to the eligibility criteria for each service provider in the organization's network.⁵⁷ Further, staff should be able to track the status of referrals, including denials of service, accepted service, re-referrals, and process-oriented obstacles or ameliorations (such as why a participant didn't show up for an appointment and any communication between the case manager and the service provider to resolve any issues).⁵⁸ These data will allow community-based organizations the ability to analyze which service providers best serve their participants and which processes are essential to achieving successful referrals to services.

Building and Maintaining Trust

The target population has acquired several labels—"high-risk," "hard to reach," "disconnected," among others—because these youth are often considered extremely difficult to serve from an organization's perspective, as often the youth are not seeking services for themselves and have a hard time engaging in services consistently.⁵⁹ This is often due to mistrust built up over the course of the youth's life as a result of people and institutions disappointing them again and again. This distrust makes engaging youth a difficult task for service providers. However, there are strategies to overcome this obstacle. Showing consistency and accessibility by employing credible messengers and bringing services to the local community can demonstrate to youth the organization's commitment to engaging them in meaningful services. It is important to note that once a community-based organization has earned a youth's trust, it is imperative to maintain it, because once trust is lost, it is very difficult to regain.

Sustainable Long-Term Funding

Trust is jeopardized or broken when services and/or resources are cut. For example, if a program loses funding and can no longer operate in a community, the youth participants do not understand the complex world of funding and government, and may internalize this loss and view it as another rejection, which can exacerbate problem behaviors and symptoms. Many organizations report that at one time or another they have been required to shut down operations, shrink their catchment area, or roll-back services due to funding cuts. Devastatingly, they often report an outbreak of violence immediately after the reduction of services, underscoring the importance and the impact of their presence in the community.

Further, unstable funding places added stress on staff and can put them in a difficult situation. For example, youth will continue to reach out to staff for assistance, resources, and support after the program has been downsized or the youth is no longer living in the catchment area. This requires the staff person to decide to either volunteer their limited time and energy to continue to serve the youth or to detach from the youth they have built a relationship with and hope the youth finds another connection elsewhere.

While funding gaps lead to disappointment, they also disrupt services for youth in need. This is very problematic, especially as more and more organizations implement evidence-based programming that requires the right dosage of intervention without interruption to produce expected results. Therefore, policymakers and funders should be mindful of how funding strategies impact program delivery. For example, organizations are often granted seed money to get the program started, but some lack the capacity to raise long-term funds to keep the program running. In other scenarios, organizations that are successful in reducing shootings and killings in their communities may become ineligible for funding because the number of incidents no longer meet the required thresholds set by funders. Due to the complexities of crew violence, short-term reductions in violence do not necessarily correlate to sustained reductions; therefore, organizations should continue to receive funding to maintain the peace and expand services until long-term trends reveal they are no longer needed. For these reasons, it is essential to strategize on how money is invested and also consider investing in organizational development and/or capacity building technical assistance to help organizations build internal capacity to acquire sustainable long-term funding.

Clearly Defined Roles

With so many organizations providing services to high-risk youth, and limited resources to go around, it is important to clearly define the roles of each organization along the continuum. This will help to mitigate the feelings of competition and also help organizations to communicate their value added. New York City has the opportunity to create a comprehensive continuum of services to address this problem. Moreover, by coordinating these services and defining each organization's role, we can relieve the impression that organizations need to develop solutions on their own. This will minimize the duplication of services, help to more accurately measure the impact of interventions, and maximize the dollars invested in such interventions. Most importantly, this will allow organizations to focus their efforts on where they are most effective, rather than struggling to provide services to meet every need and competing for grants in unfamiliar territory to make ends meet. Ultimately, this coordination of services will create specialized organizations with in-depth knowledge and practice on how to approach and solve specific problems, leading to genuine and legitimate change among youth and communities affected by violence.

CONCLUSION

As youth develop their identity, set goals, and plan for their future, they stop committing crime.⁶⁰ New York City is fortunate to have many effective programs and interventions already in existence that can help youth get them there. What is needed now is a unified effort among portals, wrap-around services, and policymakers to create an effective continuum of services to better serve the target population. By investing in interventions that focus on education and vocational skills, strengthening bonds to conventional social groups, emphasizing the role of the family and community, and coordinating the community-based organizations that provide these services, we can create comprehensive strategies that reduce violence and make our communities safer.⁶¹

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CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION
OF NEW YORK CITY

ASSESSING NEW YORK CITY'S YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE CRISIS: CREWS

VOLUME III

RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

COORDINATING A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

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For more information about the Crime Commission's Gang and Group Violence Prevention Initiative, contact Stephanie Ueberall at ueberall@caasny.com

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