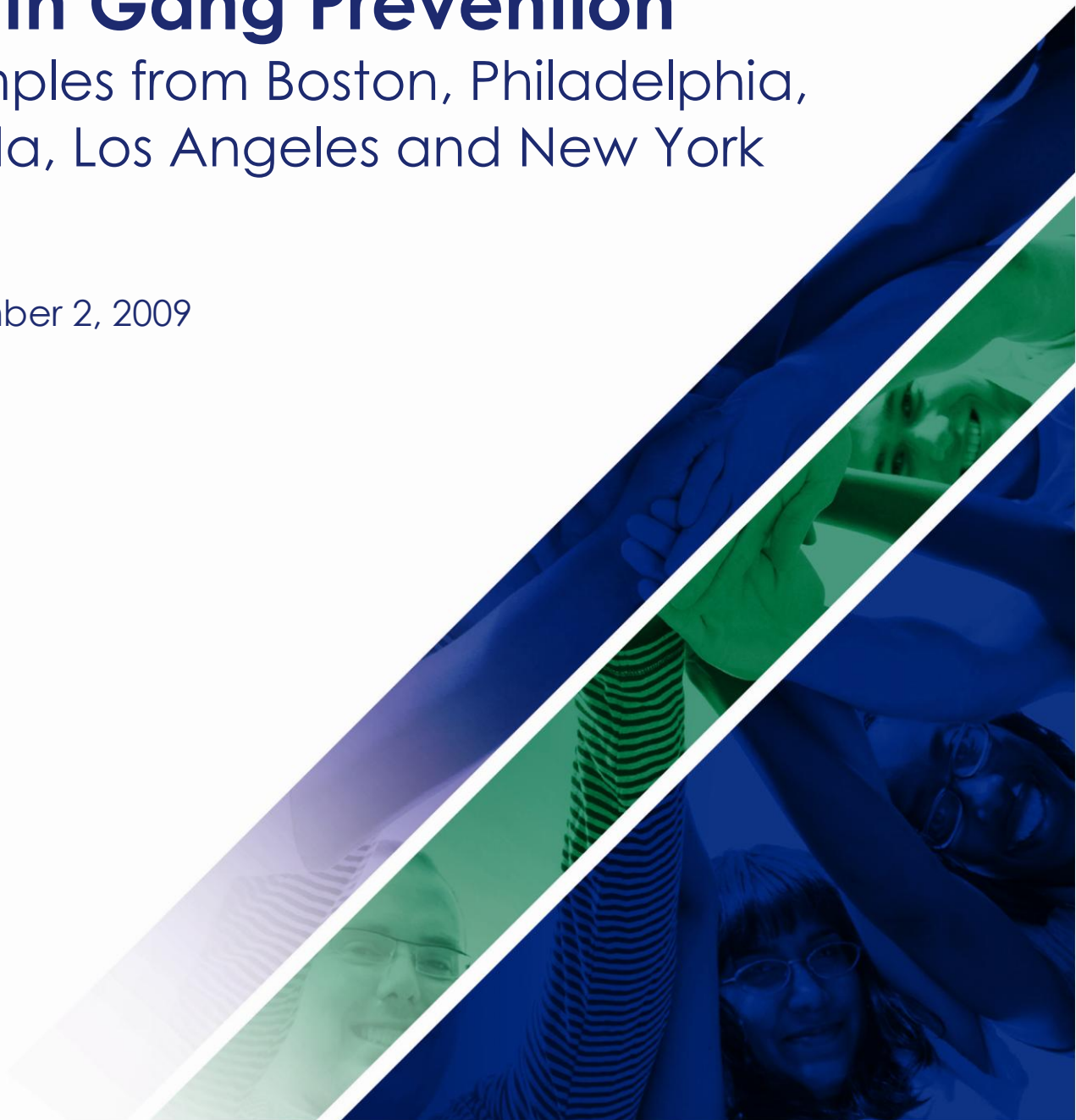




# Faith-Based Approaches to Youth Gang Prevention

Examples from Boston, Philadelphia, Florida, Los Angeles and New York

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## **Introduction**

Crime Prevention Ottawa and the Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative have been exploring different ways to engage with youth who are at risk of criminal activity or gang involvement. There are many ways to approach this issue and we have been approached by a number of religious leaders who have expressed their interest in being involved. In order to get a discussion started on how religious leaders in Ottawa can play a role in prevention we asked a student volunteer to put together this review of faith-based approaches to prevent as this has been an important element to prevent in many US Cities. We also know from our work in Ottawa that lack of hope for the future is a risk factor for young men.

Many thanks to Roxana Neculescu from the University of Toronto for her work in producing this review of faith based approaches to youth crime and gang issues.

## **Operation Ceasefire, Part of 'The Boston Miracle'**

Prior to Operation Ceasefire, Boston had seen a very high level of homicides in the age group of 24 years and less- in 1990 alone there were 152 homicides.

### **Method**

The ten coalition ministers involved in the Boston initiative paired up with the police to combat the youth gang issue and the racial issues prevalent in Boston at the time. The Ten Point Coalition, headed by Reverend Eugene Rivers, focused on preventing youth from becoming involved in gangs by having clergy, social service workers, and police run home visits to the homes of 'at risk' youth, noting what needs to be focused on such as food, clothes, literacy training, jobs and after-school programs.

The partnership between the police and the Ten Point Coalition was maintained through regular participation from both parties in 'gang forums' which the police began holding at the beginning of 1996. These gang forums were a main component of Operation Ceasefire and focused on the small number of chronic offenders involved in gang activities that were responsible for the majority of Boston's youth crime. Gang members would be invited to the forums as well as other individuals from criminal justice and social service agencies. The criminal justice and social service agencies along with the police and clergy would confront the youth in attendance, telling them that if they ceased their gang-related activities they could help them out with jobs, school etc. However,

if the youth chose not to, they were informed that they would be put in jail. Having the police in attendance was essential in that it showed the youth that the deal was real and that failure to comply would have consequences.

### **Evaluation**

In 1996 while the gang forums were being held, there was a 63% reduction in the monthly youth homicide rate.

Although the amount of homicides in Boston shot up in 2001 to 68 from 39 in 2000, the general opinion among ministers, police and social service workers is that there has not been a significant increase. The amount of crimes committed with guns increased less than 11%. There have been reports from police officers noting that more shootings are occurring indoors and are of a premeditated nature within a larger age group bracket- those aged 25 to 32. Boston will continue to use partnerships between clergy, police and other agencies to cope with the rising amount of homicides.

### **References**

Winship, Christopher. End of a Miracle? Crime, Faith, and Partnership in Boston in the 1990's. United States of America: Harvard University, 2002.

J. De Souza, Rev. Raymond. "The man behind the 'Boston Miracle'" National Post. 2005. < [www.catholiceducation.org/articles/catholic\\_stories/cs0147.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/catholic_stories/cs0147.html)>

Duane, Daniel. "Straight Outta Boston" Mother Jones.2006.  
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## **Youth and Congregations in Partnership – Brooklyn, New York**

### **Method**

Run by the Juvenile Crimes Division of the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, the YCP initiative involved mentors from a multitude of religions including Muslim, Jewish and Christian.

The program was created for youth on the juvenile caseload between the ages of 13 and 22 who had been referred to the District Attorney's office by social service agencies, judges, attorneys and probation officers. For each participating youth, each congregation involved was to provide three to five mentors. The YCP matched 43 youths with mentors during 2001-2002.

The YCP program is a full year process during which the youth is mentored by their three to five mentor committees. The participating youth is also exposed to a variety of comprehensive services such as anger management and conflict resolution classes, parent/guardian & family training, recreational and arts experiences, substance abuse counselling and educational support, among others.

The youths involved were not required to participate in religious activities in order to continue with the program, although the program did take place in a Church.

### **Evaluation**

Youths who participated in the YCP initiative showed higher levels of community involvement, social and academic improvement, and increased self-worth. The program was found to benefit both the youths involved as well as the Brooklyn community who experienced a reduction of youth crime and recidivism.

### **References**

Bauldry, Shawn and Hartmann, Tracey. A The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 2004.

"Youth and Congregations in Partnership" King County District Attorney's Office, 2001. <[http://www.brooklynda.org/YCP/YCP.htm#Other\\_Partners](http://www.brooklynda.org/YCP/YCP.htm#Other_Partners)>

Davie, Fred and Blank, Susan. Faith in their Futures: The Youth and Congregations in Partnership Program of the Kings County (Brooklyn, NY) District Attorney's Office. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 200.

## **Amachi – Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia**

Children with an incarcerated parent face challenges such as limited educational opportunities, violence, poverty, reduced hope for the future and having to see their parent be arrested is traumatic for them as they often lose their central adult and role model. As a result of their grief and confusion from losing their parent, it is common that these children act out in the classroom, show low initiative levels, and a high percentage often end up in trouble with the law themselves. Amachi is a partnership initiative with the Big Brother Big Sister of America (BBBS) organization that combines a faith based institution (the Churches) and a secular organization (BBBS) in efforts to provide a mentoring service for children with an incarcerated parent.

## **Method**

Volunteers from inner-city church congregations were appointed by the church Pastor and then recruited and trained by BBBS workers for one-on-one mentoring with mentees who a large percentage of were under 10. Local churches were selected as a partner for the mentoring initiative because it was seen by children in the community as a safe haven- they ran day-care centers as well as after-school programs prior to the Amachi initiative. By the end of January 2002, Amachi was running through 42 churches, with 400 mentor-mentee matches.

Amachi is based on research that shows benefits for mentoring- that positive outcomes occur when a mentor and mentee meet regularly for a year within a program that has a solid basis.

Caregivers of children with an incarcerated parent were sent a letter that described Amachi, which was then followed up by a phone call.

During the first 2 years of Amachi, 556 children were paired with mentors. The mentors who were volunteers from the Church congregation were chosen by the pastor based on their relevant volunteer experience or past work experience as a teacher or youth worker. A few were recommended by the pastor because they had grown up without a father and had themselves been mentored by the church community.

Each mentor and mentee had the freedom to choose the time and location of each of their meetings as well as what activities they would participate in. Some examples are movies, cultural events, meals, church services etc.

In Philadelphia, the annual cost per match was from 1200-1500\$.

## **Evaluation**

BBBS distributed surveys after the Amachi matches were in place for one year. The results showed that 93% of mentors and 82% of caregivers reported that the mentee had increased self-confidence. 60% of mentors and caregivers also stated that the child had an 'improved sense of future'.

An in-depth analysis of the first 556 matches of the initiative proved that the mentors and mentees were spending their time together engaged in 'fun' activities such as sports events, movies, concerts etc. This finding was encouraging because prior research has shown that in effective mentoring programs, the activities were of this nature.



## **References**

Jucovy, Linda. Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia. United States of America: The Center For Research On Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, 2003.

Farley, Chelsea. Amachi in Brief. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures In Brief, Issue 1, 2004.

## **Florida's Faith and Community-Based Delinquency Treatment Initiative**

In 2003, Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) received a 3.5 million grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to create a faith and community-based program for incarcerated youth.

### **Method**

FCBDTI ran five moderate (6-9 months) and high-risk (9-18 months) residential programs across Florida in which 3 programs were for males and 2 for females. The program provided faith-based and secular mentors for incarcerated youths in residential facilities.

Youths involved in the project as well as their parents must consent to participation in the initiative due to Federal and State constitutional requirements for freedom of religion. On top of voluntary consent from the youth and parent, other eligibility factors include: DJJ jurisdiction over the youth for a year or more, no need for mental health or substance abuse services, no sex offences, and living in proximity to the facility (within 50 miles). The geographical proximity requirement was meant to help the longevity of the mentor relationship with the incarcerated youth and to encourage parents' participation.

The youths involved in FCBDTI are allowed to choose and practice their own religion or faith with the help of the faith-based staff and volunteers from churches and other faith organizations. Each youth is assigned a mentor of his or her faith, or if he or she chooses they can have a secular mentor.

### **Evaluation**

Faith-based staff in the FCBDTI showed high levels of energy and motivation even in times of tribulations. Since they felt they were there as part of a 'calling' and really believed in helping the youth, they showed high levels of perseverance. Many left higher paying jobs in order to join the initiative.

Jodi Lane, the University of Florida Criminologist stated that the participating youths showed improvement in their morale, and are better behaved. Lane also noted that when speaking with the youth who participated in the FCBDTI, they let her know that they are aware people care for them now.

### **References**

Lane, Jodi and Lanza-Kaduce, Lon. Before You Open the Doors: Ten Lessons From Florida's Faith and Community-Based Delinquency Treatment Initiative. United States of America: University of Florida,

Keen, Cathy. "Faith-based programs for kids can work without legal controversies." University of Florida News, June 2007.  
<<http://news.ufl.edu/2007/06/05/faith-based/>>

## **Baton Rouge Walk-By-Faith Collaborative: Baton Rouge, Los Angeles**

### **Method**

In East Baton Rouge during 2001-2002, the Walk-By-Faith Collaborative matched 34 youth with churchgoers in a one-to-one mentoring initiative. The Collaborative was located at the Beech Grove Baptist Church, which is in the middle of the low-income high-crime neighborhoods in East Baton Rouge. The Baton Rouge Collaborative included recreational activities for the mentors and the youths as well as a weekly Bible study that was optional. It also offered an employment program and case management.

Baton Rouge had 8 congregations involved in its high-risk youth initiative but did not include other religious groups besides Christian.

The mentees were high-risk youth either already involved in delinquent activity or deemed likely to become involved in delinquent and/or criminal activity in the future by their schools, parents, or community members.

Partnerships with juvenile justice agencies were also developed, particularly with the Juvenile Court/ Probation Department.

### **Evaluation**

Public/Private Ventures, the organization monitoring the faith-based initiatives across the United States, found that small faith-based organizations involved in initiatives to address the issues with high-risk youth, such as the Baton Rouge

Collaborative, worked together effectively. The common mission of helping youth in need helped with perseverance.

Baton Rouge was especially effective in engaging a greater number of congregations due to the youth being their own community members.

Analyses done on the National Faith Based Initiatives by Public/Private Ventures have shown that the high-risk youth who participated as mentees in the mentoring program benefited in many ways, specifically in relation to alleviating depression.

### **References**

Bauldry, Shawn and Hartmann, Tracey. A The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 2004.

Hartmann, Tracey A. Moving Behind the Walls: Faith and Justice Partnerships Working for High-Risk Youth. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 2002.

Bauldry, Shawn. Positive Support: Mentoring and Depression Among High-Risk Youth. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 2006.

## **'BronxConnect' Bronx Church Mentoring Outreach, New York**

### **Method**

The Urban Youth Alliance Initiative, an affiliated ministry with the Latino Clergy of the Bronx, matched youth from ages 12-18 who are involved with the Bronx juvenile or criminal justice system with mentors who coached them on goal formation with regards to employment and education.

The youth involved in the initiative were referred from agencies within the justice system and often chose to participate in BronxConnect instead of incarceration. During 2000-2001, 13 youth were meeting with their mentor for 2 hours per week for a year.

BronxConnect was a very small program, with only 2 staff, which focused on matching youth and mentors from the same community. Churches of all denominations were involved and provided mentors for BronxConnect.

BronxConnect is partnered with a variety of agencies in the Bronx that provide additional support for the youths involved such as job placements and mental health services.

### **Evaluation**

After partnering with the Bronx courts in 2000, BronxConnect showed an 83% success rate in preventing youth from re-offending.

Despite being a small program, BronxConnect being run by the Urban Youth Alliance Initiative helped to connect the youth involved to other services that they might otherwise not have had access to.

### **References**

Bauldry, Shawn and Hartmann, Tracey. A The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth. United States of America: Public/Private Ventures, 2004.

"BronxConnect." Urban Youth Alliance International, 2007.  
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## **Appendix – Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative (OYGPI)**

### **Framework for an Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Strategy**

In order to prevent the harmful effects of youth gangs in communities and to prevent young people from becoming involved in gang activity, a four component approach is proposed: Healthy Neighbourhood Cohesion, Prevention, Intervention and Suppression.

Each of these components requires an integrated approach that unites youth, families, schools, community, social service agencies and police in multiple efforts to reduce youth gang activity in Ottawa. The different components also need to be integrated together to create a web of community, family and services that nurture young people and prevent the attraction of gang life.

Investments addressing the four components will be focused in those neighbourhoods most in need of assistance, ensuring they get the evidence-based tools and resources necessary to tackle this problem.

**Healthy Neighbourhood Cohesion** refers to building positive relationships in gang affected neighbourhoods to reduce fear, strengthen relationships, increase evidence of positive social interactions and increase community capacity to recognize and address unacceptable activities. This can include community celebrations, Neighbourhood Watch, community clean-ups and other activities.

**Prevention** refers to activities, programs, curriculum and other supports, which seek to positively engage young people with their families, their schools and their community before they are attracted to gang life. This could include after school programming, pro-social recreation, mentoring, outreach, supports to stay engaged in learning and /or school, mental health supports, employment programs, parenting programs and other activities.

**Intervention** refers to programming that engages with youth who are involved or beginning to be involved in youth gang activity. This can include exit programming, intensive employment programming, and programmes for suspended or expelled students, mental health programs, intensive employment programs and other interventions.

**Suppression** refers to targeted enforcement aimed at criminal gang activity. This can include highly visible policing, such as the Direct Action Response Team (DART) and it can also include collaborations between landlords and the Police on targeted evictions.

To implement this approach, the strategy must rely on research with regards to the evidence on what actually works and the dissemination of information. There must be a plan to effectively educate, inform, and engage service providers and the community. Parents, teachers, community agency staff and police need accurate up to date information with regards to youth gangs and youth gang prevention in order to act effectively.

The strategy must build on other relevant initiatives and existing services to ensure coordination, the most effective use of resources and a holistic approach to achieving desired outcomes.

Finally our approach will be strength-based. We need to build on the assets in our communities: the natural leadership and successful services that already exist. We must engage youth and their families, using diversity and cultural assets to ensure positive outcomes for our youth.





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