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Mayor



PEACEBUILDERS INITIATIVE

When the Hartford Office for Youth Services (HOYS) was established in the fall of 2006, one of its immediate actions was to commission an analysis of youth violence in the City of Hartford that would include recommendations based on local and national survey of violence intervention strategies. In response to this work, a request for proposals was issued by HOYS in the summer of 2007. That fall a group of agencies was selected to help implement the Peacebuilders initiative in partnership with HOYS.

The target areas for the Peacebuilders Initiative were determined based on Hartford Police Department statistics for the neighborhoods with the highest numbers of violent crime by youth. While the four neighborhoods targeted by Peacebuilders are Frog Hollow, Barry Square, led by a South Team and Northeast and Upper Albany led by a North Team, the teams frequently work in partnership both to respond to major crisis and to support each other during special events.

All nine of the Peacebuilder staff are from Hartford and have spent their lives, literally and figuratively, walking the paths of the youth they work with. Because of this, they are most effectively positioned to reach and connect with the target population of the Peacebuilders initiative. The team has undergone extensive training, including the 32 week Youth Development Practitioners Academy, and training on topics such as Psychological First Aid, crisis intervention, mediation, and grief counseling.

Peacebuilders work in partnership with the Hartford Police Department and St. Francis Hospital, where they are deputized to work with families in the emergency room and treatment settings. Because of the deep connections the Peacebuilders have with the community, they are able to work on a street level to quell violence, prevent retaliation and help youth and families process grief in the immediate aftermath of the incident and connect them with additional services and supports.

Since Peacebuilders was initiated:

- 98% of participants are youth of color
- Age at intake
 - between 13 and 15 years old 30%
 - between 16 and 18 years old 61%
 - between 19 and 21 years old 9%
- Last or current grade attended at time of intake:
 - Under 9th Grade 20%
 - 9th grade 40%
 - 10th grade 21%
 - 11th grade 11%
 - 12th grade 7%
 - Post Secondary 1%
- 55% of Participants live in the four targeted neighborhoods
- Peacebuilders have engaged 358 youth in the program.
- The average length of a youth's engagement with Peacebuilders was 9 months.
- Peacebuilders spent more than 4,377 hours in one on one contact with youth
- On average, a Peacebuilder spends 11 hours per week in direct one on one intervention with youth.
- Peacebuilders have mediated 44 conflicts involving youth on the caseload, and in almost all of those instances, have prevented additional retaliation and/or violence.
- Out of 86 youth whose progress was assessed through the Peacebuilders assessment more than once, 49 have made positive improvements.

BUILDING PEACE: The great power of the Peacebuilders is the deep relationships they have with youth, parents and the wider community. The deep trust they have built means that they often have access to information about violent acts, and the threat of violence that is not held elsewhere in the community. Armed with this knowledge, Peacebuilders are able to intervene and prevent additional acts of violence. Below are just a few examples of how Peacebuilders work to build peace in the streets of Hartford.

SEPTEMBER 2007: Following an incident where a group of young people shot at the front door of a student attending Fox Middle School, Peacebuilders received information from an involved party that there was an intent to retaliate the next day at the close of school. In response to this information, Peacebuilders were able to deploy both the North and South teams as well as notify police who had a strong presence at the school as well at the time of dismissal. As a result, no retaliation occurred. Tragically, almost exactly a year prior a shockingly similar incident occurred, though at this time, no prior knowledge was had about the intent to retaliate. Unfortunately, the result was the serious shooting injury of a young man near school grounds.

AUGUST 2008: The Peacebuilders played an integral role in responding to the tragic shooting of 10 victims, ages 18 months to 21 years old, after the West Indian Day Parade. A Peacebuilder was on the scene within minutes, and was able to deploy the rest of the team, who were split between St. Francis and Hartford Hospital. Peacebuilders worked with the victims, and family members, aiding with communication and helping to calm the crowds that had collected at St. Francis, where the majority of the shooting victims were brought, one of whom died shortly after arriving at the hospital. Four additional victims were shot, two later that night, and two more the following morning. During this tension and grief filled weekend, the Peacebuilders worked non-stop, conducting several home visits both to victims and known perpetrators. Peacebuilders also met and negotiated with suspected known perpetrators on the street, where they were contemplating retaliation.

SEPTEMBER 2008: As one of the follow up actions as part of the Peacebuilder response to the West Indian Day Parade tragedy, the staff convened a group of service providers from Capital Region Mental Health, Wheeler Clinic, the Office for Youth Services, the State's Attorney Office and faith based leaders, to meet with seven of the families impacted by this violence. Families and friends were offered mental health counseling, medical treatment and ongoing support to weather the aftermath of the crisis and grief. As a result, the Hartford Crisis Response Team was formed, consisting of service providers who are ready to respond in a coordinated way to violent crimes in the City of Hartford. The team also produced a brochure to outline relevant services and contact information that youth and families may need in the aftermath of a violent tragedy.

NOVEMBER 2008: An 18 year old youth was tragically stabbed after leaving his GED class at the Urban League. Several of his friends carried him several blocks down the street to St. Francis Hospital, where he ultimately lost his life. The Peacebuilder team immediately responded to the scene of the attack and worked with the youth, families and staff of the Urban League, all of whom were deeply traumatized. Over the course of the next two weeks, the staff worked tirelessly to help this community process the grief of this senseless act.

FEBRUARY 2009: The staff of Peacebuilders was informed by some students at Bulkeley High School that a young man and some of his friends who were not currently enrolled in the school, were on school grounds, carrying a gun, in order to settle a dispute with a student. The Peacebuilders were able to both notify the police, as well as arrive on the scene immediately in order to be a presence at the school site. The young man was ultimately located and removed from school grounds without further incident.

TOMORROW???: There are countless other incidents, some which have made the press, many more which have not, where Peacebuilders have responded and have been able to achieve the outcome of peace on Hartford streets. While we can never quantify the number of shootings prevented, lives saved, the fact remains that peaceful resolutions have been the result of almost all of the conflicts that Peacebuilders have mediated.

How do you measure a life that's been saved?