

# ACES- YOUTH VOICES IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

## Urban Teens Propose Violence Prevention Strategies

By [Traci Pedersen](#)



When urban teens were asked to identify solutions for reducing violence in their New Haven, Connecticut community, their recommendations were loud and clear: They hoped for better employment opportunities, more after-school activities, and a cleaner city environment.

The teens' suggestions are the culmination of a unique project called Youth Haven in which 12 youth ambassadors between the ages of 16 and 18 were recruited from city public schools for their interest in violence prevention.

As part of the project, the teens held a citywide Youth Congress in an effort to hear and discuss other teens' ideas on how to reduce community violence. Each group was led by a youth ambassador and facilitated by adult academic and community partners. Among teens attending the conference, 61 percent reported having a family member who had been killed by an act of violence, and 81 percent said a family member had been hurt by an act of violence.

Researchers collected and analyzed data based on audience response surveys and small group sessions. The violence prevention priorities that were identified focused on improving employment opportunities for teens, after-school activities for all ages, and the city's physical environment.

The youth ambassadors then presented their research findings to city leaders, including law enforcement officials, and directly contributed to the development of a citywide planning document on violence prevention policy, said lead author James Dodington, M.D., FAAP, a pediatric emergency medicine fellow at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, who will outline the project's findings during an upcoming AAP conference.

Because urban youth are disproportionately impacted by violence, suffering loss of support systems and experiencing chronic stress due to living in an unsafe environment, they should be more frequently included in violence prevention activities, Dodington said. "Our study demonstrates that youth can be fully engaged as partners in community-based participatory research on violence prevention, and can effectively contribute to related policy discussion by gathering consensus from their peers and leading evidence-based research efforts," Dodington said.

"The incorporation of youth perspectives, experiences, and priorities is both feasible and critical to creating violence prevention strategies and policies that can be endorsed by those for whom the policies are often intended."

Findings from the project Youth Haven will be presented at the 2015 American Academy of Pediatrics Conference & Exhibition in Washington, DC. Source: [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)