

# R. T. Rybak

## Mayor of Minneapolis

*Mayor R.T. Rybak presented “The State of the Blueprint Report” at the Blueprint for Action Youth Violence Prevention Conference in Minneapolis, in May 2011. He described Minneapolis’ plan to prevent violence affecting youth, the Blueprint for Action, and he highlighted important gains made over the initial years of implementing this initiative. The following narrative is excerpted from his remarks.*

It has been an incredibly inspirational journey, but it is a journey that started with incredible heartache. One summer a few years back, Councilmember Don Samuels and I were talking about the funeral we had just left. We were talking about how we could dialogue with survivors of violence. The only way that I have been able to have any sort of authentic relationship with people at a moment of a shooting, at a funeral, at the first Christmas with their child gone, is to imagine that this was my own child [who was killed]. And as Don and I stood there in that funeral home parking lot, having seen so many kids die that year, we had to come to terms with the fact that in our minds, on some level, we had gone through the deaths of our own children multiple times. We were wondering, “What do we do next? And how do we lead the community through this?” There were plenty of small tactical things we were doing and there were plenty of big things we were doing, but as we stood there I had to say to Don, “I’m not sure what to do.” Recognizing that we did not know what to do was one of the most frightening moments I have ever had in my life. Today we can answer the question; we know exactly what to do, and it is in our [Blueprint for Action](#), [our plan to reduce and prevent violence affecting youth].

### The Blueprint for Action

We knew we had to do something different, so we came back to the community and spent many months laying out a plan that takes a public health approach to youth violence. The public health approach means backing up from the emergency room where you bandage the wound and starting at the beginning, understanding why that person is there in the ER at all. (See “Adopting the Public Health Approach” on page 3.)



#### Minneapolis Mayor

**R.T. Rybak's** top priorities are creating opportunities for youth, growing Minneapolis' economy and making Minneapolis a safe place to call home, all within the framework of reform and fiscal responsibility. Mayor Rybak co-founded the highly successful [Minneapolis Promise](#), and is chair of the [Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board](#), which brings stakeholders to one table to coordinate policy that meets the needs of youth. Mayor Rybak also began Minneapolis' [Youth Violence Prevention Initiative](#), a public health approach to keeping youth safe that has helped bring violent crime in Minneapolis to a 28-year low. Mayor Rybak's other successes include training and placing hard-to-employ adults in jobs; lowering Minneapolis' unemployment rate to at or below the statewide average; dramatically expanding people's options for getting around Minneapolis; building thousands of affordable housing units; and paying down \$183 million in debt and restoring the City's AAA credit rating, despite ongoing crises in the state and federal budgets. The people of Minneapolis first elected R.T. Rybak mayor in 2001 and overwhelmingly re-elected him in 2005 and 2009.

We laid out four core goals in the Blueprint for Action:

### **1. Connect every young person to a trusted adult.**

We do many things to surround young people with trusted adults. For example, there's our mentorship program, and the [Minneapolis Promise program](#) that connects students to [STEP-UP summer jobs](#) and career centers in every high school. We moved police officers into the schools, not to arrest kids but to build authentic relationships with them. These amazing police officers also hop on bikes in the summer and ride through north Minneapolis doing all these positive things through the [Bike Cops for Kids program](#), which is now expanding to south Minneapolis.

An important part of this is the relationship between the parent and the child. We have trained parents so they're ready to go. The graduation of a [Northside Achievement Zone](#) class of 25 parents who had put in the time to be good parents is one of the most powerful events I have ever been to. I had just come from my son's graduation to see these parents proudly walking down the aisle with their little kids saying, "I am ready to be a parent." That's their victory.

### **2. Intervene at the first sign of at-risk behavior.**

We had so many children in this community killing and deeply wounding other children, both physically and mentally. It used to be it took something very large for a young person to pull the trigger, but now it can be about something really small, like the jacket you're wearing or whose turf you happened to be on. I have been to many funerals where some people say, "I knew this would happen." If you knew it would happen, why didn't we do something earlier to stop it? I put that question to all of us.

One example of acting on early warning signs is our curfew and truancy work. We changed our curfew truancy center intervention strategies so we don't just say, "You missed school," but we ask, "Why did you miss school? You're out too late at night. Why are you out so late?" The Juvenile Supervision Center in City Hall has done a lot to build the capacity of kids to not be back there again.

### **3. Restore youth who have gone down the wrong path.**

It can be tough to love a violent kid or a kid who has done something wrong, but we do it anyway because they are part of our community. How do we heal that relationship? To rejuvenate our kids, we have to use the teachable moments, like when you're at the emergency room

## **MORE ON THE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION**

To learn more about Minneapolis' initiative to prevent violence affecting youth, read "[Blueprint for Action—Preventing Violence in Minneapolis](#)," available for download at [www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org). In this publication, the youth violence prevention coordinator describes the various programs Minneapolis has implemented as part of an integrated strategy.

The Blueprint for Action was recognized by the National League of Cities in 2009 as one of the most innovative city models for preventing violence affecting youth. Read "[Blueprint for Action—Preventing Violence in Minneapolis](#)" to learn how Minnesota has leveraged strong community partnerships and limited funding to maximize results.

## ADOPTING THE PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

“Between 2003 and 2006, approximately 80 Minneapolis residents between 15 and 24 died as the result of homicide. This number represents 80 mommas’ babies, lives that mattered, that had potential, lights snuffed out too soon. We know what violence does to a community—it takes a toll on our physical and mental health, it promotes other unhealthy behaviors, and it leads people to disinvest in community. But most of all, it leaves a hole in our soul.

“In 2006, many in Minneapolis began to explore a new way of thinking about violence. I was motivated by the voices of the youth who told us that they were afraid in our community, that they felt that adults weren’t doing enough to help them, and that the culture of violence in our society was all they had ever known.

“The research on the ground in our community, in the literature and across the country suggested that viewing youth violence as a public health issue would be an approach that could save lives. The City embraced the notion that the same approaches that have been used to ensure a safe water supply, clean air, prevent mumps and measles through childhood immunization, and increase healthy births through quality prenatal care—all things we now take for granted—could be used to prevent violence. Overlay this same prevention framework on youth violence and we can:

- Provide education and support to everyone to prevent youth violence,
- Target interventions to youth in high-crime areas and those in greatest need, and
- Rehabilitate youth offenders and provide services for victims and survivors.

“These conversations prompted the Minneapolis City Council to pass a resolution that declared youth violence a public health issue and created a steering committee to lead the development of the Minneapolis Youth Violence Blueprint for Action. Data shows that youth violence in our community has declined, and much of that can be attributed to a community who cared, who dared to take a different approach to stopping violence.”



**Karen Kelley-Ariwoola** is vice president of community philanthropy at The Minneapolis Foundation, and she helped facilitate the process of developing the Blueprint for Action in 2003. Kelley-Ariwoola presented at the Blueprint for Action Youth Violence Prevention Conference in Minneapolis, in May 2011, and this is an edited transcript of her remarks.

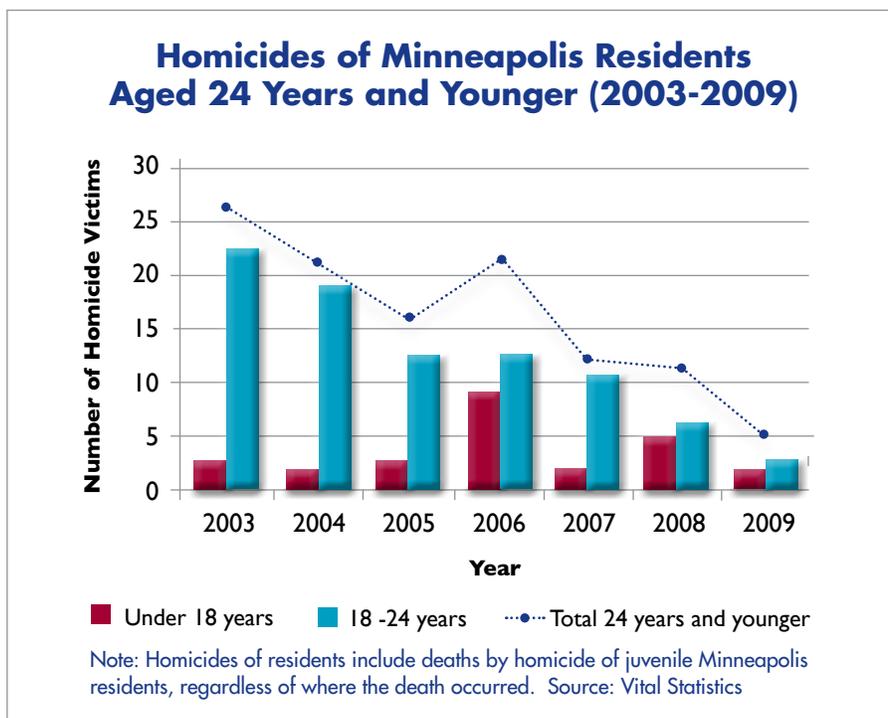
surrounded by people whose response to someone being shot is revenge. That’s clearly an understandable emotion, but clearly that emotion moves one horribly tragic moment into two, three or seven. Shutting down that whole culture of violence at that moment is critical. One thing we have done is gone into emergency rooms and trained responders to look into the faces of the victim and his friends, and to use a protocol to stop the violence right there. We also have the North 4 Youth Employment Program, an intensive employment program for gang-involved kids, and the Build Program and the Gang Prevention Youth Mentoring Project, both designed to strengthen positive relationships.

#### 4. Unlearn the culture of violence.

You can hold a baby in your hands, this wonderful and innocent life, and recognize that this child did not come out of a womb violent. When we then see a community where young people are involved in violence, we have to come to terms with the fact that we, every parent and every member of this community, through our collective actions, somehow taught violence to that child. We have to stop being neutral in this community. Instead, we have to back up and figure out what actions to take for our young people to unlearn the culture of violence.

### Making a Positive Impact

I want to show you the impact of all of this work through some key indicators. We saw nine homicides of kids under 18 in 2006, up from three in 2003. This was incredibly vexing because our goal is zero. We are very pleased that this number has gone down from nine. We watched crime rates go down, and there are fewer juveniles involved in crime because of this work. We are not where we need to be yet, but we are certainly moving in the right direction.



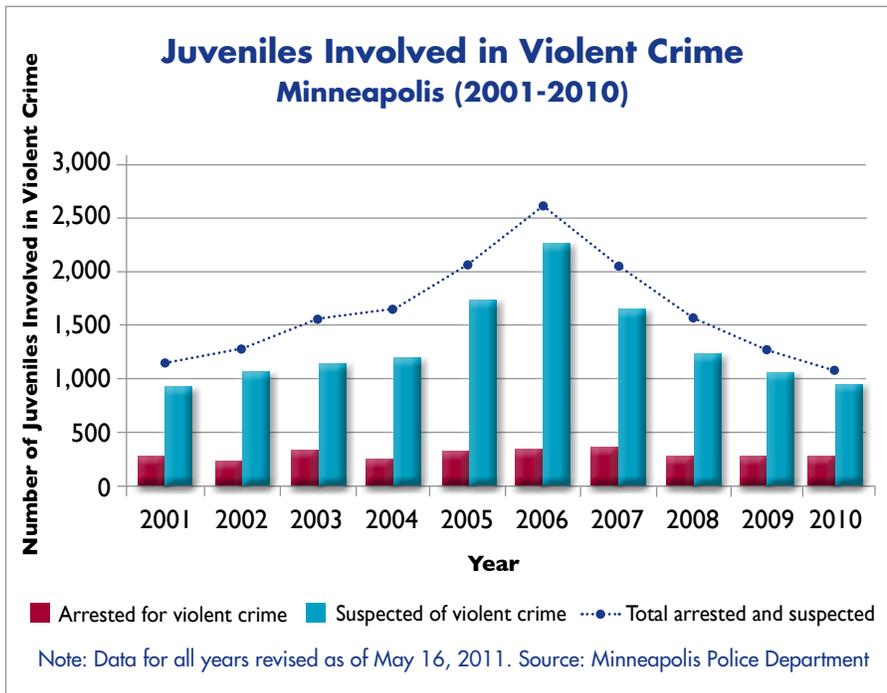
**Homicides of Minneapolis Residents (2003-2009).** Nine young people under 18 years of age in Minneapolis were killed in 2006. Homicides of children tripled from 2003, but after implementing the Blueprint for Action, Minneapolis saw this number drop to two homicides in 2009. (Graph courtesy of the Department of Health & Family Support, City of Minneapolis.)

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The [Minneapolis Youth Congress](#) was established in 2007 to involve young people in city decisions that affect them and to engage students in local government. The Youth Congress creates a mechanism for youth to influence decisions and policies on education, housing, safety, employment, transportation and health. Mayor R.T. Rybak said that the Youth Congress has informed the city's efforts to prevent violence.

"We have incredibly authentic relationships with kids. They are at the table in all of this work," said Mayor R.T. Rybak. "Kids are our most valuable asset, and the Youth Congress has made it clear—'no decision about us without us.'"

The Youth Congress has helped shape programs such as the Power of YOU, U Promise Free Tuition, and STEP-UP. The Power of YOU program covers tuition at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College, and U Promise allows students to attend the University of Minnesota for free. The STEP-UP summer jobs program employs young people in quality jobs in the private, public and non-profit sectors.



**Juveniles Involved in Violent Crime (2001-2010).** The number of people under 18 years old either suspected or arrested for violent crime steadily increased starting in 2001, peaking at 2,652 in 2006. This decreased by more than half after Minneapolis launched the Blueprint for Action, and the number in 2010 is the lowest in a decade. (Graph courtesy of the Department of Health & Family Support, City of Minneapolis.)

We continue to work through all of those issues to keep these numbers where they should be. When we introduced the Blueprint, we said that this was not a commitment of one year or one term of an elected official. It is about a collective value system in this community that says yes, we will raise our children in peace. We have not yet reached our ultimate goal of not a single homicide in the city, but the Blueprint and the work of many people have had a powerful and significant impact on making this community safer.

**Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY)** builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs, so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with ample opportunities and supportive relationships. A Prevention Institute initiative, UNITY is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and in part by the Kresge Foundation.

For more information, visit [www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org).

*“Minneapolis is a proud member of the UNITY City Network and has benefited tremendously from the assets and resources [that] network has provided.”*

—R.T. RYBAK, MAYOR  
CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
(PERSONAL COMMUNICATION,  
MAY 17, 2011)