

Partnerships to Prevent Violence in Chicago

Representatives from five UNITY cities participated in the panel discussion "Prevention Works: UNITY City Network members from around the country share their successful local efforts," moderated by Neil Rainford of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The panel was part of The California Wellness Foundation's Conference on Violence Prevention held in October 2010, in Los Angeles. The following narrative is excerpted from remarks by Christopher Mallette on partnerships forged in Chicago to prevent violence among youth.



Our vision is for Chicago to become a city where all children are safe, healthy and educated. Kids do not go to school if they don't feel safe getting there and if they don't feel safe when they're there. We want to make sure they are healthy so that they can learn, grow and develop appropriately.

We take a multidisciplinary approach in Chicago where we look at youth violence and youth violence prevention from a public health and public safety perspective. We look at risk factors and protective factors simultaneously in everything we do, which can be very difficult but is essential for our success. Coordination is essential, and having someone to coordinate this whole thing is invaluable.

The key element for youth violence prevention in Chicago is getting folks around the table. The first thing is to identify who needs to be there. We work with a lot of different agencies because we try to take a



Christopher Mallette is the executive director of Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy at the Center for Crime Prevention and Control, John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy is referred to as Operation Ceasefire in other jurisdictions around the country. At the time of his remarks, Mallette was the director of community safety initiatives in the Office of Mayor Richard M. Daley, City of Chicago. He focuses on youth violence prevention, juvenile justice and ex-offender re-entry initiatives. Mallette has served as executive director of the Juvenile Intervention Support Center in Chicago, and his previous positions include assistant corporation counsel for the City of Chicago, general counsel for The Faith Community of St. Sabina, athletic director and executive director of St. Sabina's youth center, and cluster coordinator for the Chicago Public Schools. A graduate of Princeton University, Mallette received his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

kaleidoscopic lens, a coaches' box approach. When you coach football, if you're on the field, you can only see what's out there on the field. When you move up into the coaches' box you can see everything. So we bring everybody to the table to get the entire picture. Who do we have at the table?

- The Mayor's Office
- Schools
- Department of Public Health
- Chicago Police Department
- Chicago alternative policing strategies
- Department of Family Support Services
- Parks
- After School Matters, an out-of-school-time program
- Housing Authority Commission on Human Relations
- Transit Authority
- The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

We get together with all these agencies every month, and you have to have buy-in when you get these folks around the table, from the top down. Thankfully, Mayor [Richard M.] Daley is passionate about youth, youth violence prevention, and issues that surround young people in the city. We have a mandate from our mayor, and at the end of the day, whatever the mayor says is what we're going to do.

With grants, we make sure that we're not sending five proposals from five different agencies from one city. Instead, we're sitting at table, we're saying who is the most appropriate lead agency, and how can these other agencies support that lead agency in this proposal and move forward that way. That's a metamorphosis [we've undergone], changing how we do business.

We also have call every morning at 8:30 when I'm on the phone with the police department and the school system, and we analyze and dissect every incidence of youth violence that occurred in the last 24 hours in the city of Chicago, with juveniles and all the way up to age 22 if they are in alternative school in our school systems. Where did it happen? Who is it? What district? Did it happen near where they go to school, or did it happen near where they live? Are they gang-affiliated? If they are, what gangs are involved in the schools where they go, and what type of retaliation do we think might ensue? That's how we try to get ahead of the curve.

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

"Chicago had a wonderful blueprint in the 1990s, but then you had some political change and turnover of departmental heads and staff, and things wavered. One agency owned it as opposed to every agency in the entire city feeling that they had some ownership of the plan. Now we are seeing that what we did it in the past actually worked, [but we have to see] where the problems were and try to diagnose why it was not sustainable. Why was it not replicated and brought to scale? We're working to develop that comprehensive plan with the help of UNITY and the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, and we have a great foundation as we move forward."

— CHRISTOPHER MALLETTE
FORMERLY OF THE OFFICE OF THE
MAYOR, CITY OF CHICAGO

One example of the benefits of collaboration is an incident at the Cabrini Green housing projects in Chicago where about 50 or 60 kids would roam and do mischievous things. Everyone knew who they were, but nobody could do anything. So we put our heads together, and we figured out—from the schools, from the police department, from the Housing Authority and from the parks—how we could involve these kids and their families in prevention and intervention programs. We were actually able to curb the crisis that was going on in that community.

At the end of the day, the work that we are doing is purely about relationships. You peel away all the layers, you peel away all the data, you peel away your measures, you peel away your programs, and at the core of all this is relationships. You have to get that community input. If you're a principal in the school, the best informants are the 600 kids in your building. Because if they have a relationship with you, they will tell you who got shot, who's angry about it, who's getting ready to retaliate, all these different things. If you have good relationships then you have trust, and you have information flowing between the community and the government and between government agencies.

Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY) builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs, so 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 (CDC) as part of the CDC's national youth violence prevention initiative, Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE), and in part by The Kresge Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness, education, and disease prevention programs.

For more information, visit www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.

CHANGING NORMS

Changing norms is a key aspect of preventing violence, and organizations in Chicago have partnered with the city to launch a campaign integrated with the One Summer Chicago initiative.

One Summer Chicago provides meaningful, safe summer activities for youth in four neighborhoods impacted by violence. Mary's Court Foundation, Burrell Communications, Chicago Public Schools, the City of Chicago and MEE Productions saw an opportunity to combine compelling messages and promising pilot programs to achieve a shared goal—preventing violence affecting young people.

The media campaign in 2011 reaches out to youth and their families, and emphasizes the importance of students pursuing technology, sports, academics, arts and leadership opportunities. These upbeat messages feature positive role models and highlight alternatives to violence.