EVIDENCE-INFORMED STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH VICTIMIZATION AND CRIME

Rainier Beach: A Beautiful, Safe Place for Youth

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WHY FOCUS ON CRIME AT SMALL PLACES?

Crime is not evenly spread throughout a city or even a neighborhood. Most victimization and crime happens at a small number of very small places (as small as single street blocks or small groups of blocks), called "hot spots." Research shows that as much as half of all the crime that occurs in a city happens at just 3-5 percent of the city's blocks.

Crime also varies from street to street even within a neighborhood. One block could be a hot spot for many years, while the blocks surrounding it rarely experience any crime.

Lots of research shows that the police can effectively control crime when they focus efforts at this small group of hot spots. Place-based policing is efficient, because places (unlike people) don't move around. However, the type of police work that has been studied at hot spots often involves crackdowns and mass arrests, which can be bad for young people and the relationship between the police and the community.

When there is a serious crime we need a strong law enforcement response, but research also shows that young people who get into trouble are more likely to continue committing crime if they are arrested and go through the juvenile justice system. Many young people get involved in crime at some time, but an arrest record can harm their chances of getting an education and a job in the future. Youth who are involved in crime are also more likely to be victims of crime. On the other hand, young people who get help in the community are more likely to get back on track.

Community members can also help to stop young people from getting involved in crime in the first place by looking out for each other's kids and guiding them toward more positive activities and choices. Sometimes, even just changing or cleaning up problem areas on the block, like a vacant lot where people take drugs, can encourage people to stay out of trouble because it sends the message that "this community does not tolerate crime." Environmental and policy changes like these are good for communities and residents because they don't single out particular people—they encourage everyone to change their behavior for the better.

This guide gives more information about what the community can do to help prevent youth victimization and crime. When the community comes together in these efforts it is good for everyone. Communities that look out for each other and work together to solve problems tend to have lower crime rates. Remember—**"it takes a village!"**

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The police and other stakeholders know when the community can do to help prevent youth victimization and crime. When the community works together in these efforts it is good for everyone that. Communities that come together to help a problem youth to prevent crime doing through benefits—for table.

1. INCREASE SUPERVISION AND PROVIDE STRUCTURE

What does this mean?

Research shows that when young people commit crime it is usually in the company of their peers—their friends reinforce and encourage their behavior. Socializing with friends is most likely to lead to crime when it is **unstructured**—that is, there is no purpose or organization to the activity. Examples of unstructured socializing include riding in cars, 'hanging out' in the street or other public locations, or going to parties where no adults are present. Young people who are unsupervised and engaged in unstructured socializing in the after-school period tend to be more delinquent at all times of the day.

Why is it important?

Unstructured socializing is linked to higher levels of youth violence in communities. Providing young people with meaningful, structured activities reduces their opportunity to commit crime or be victimized. Organized activities like participating in team sports, doing community work, and even going to the movies can be positive and usually involve informal 'rules' that promote good behavior. Organized activities are also more likely to involve supervision by positive role models (who could be adults or other young people who are not involved in crime), which protects against negative behavior.

How do we do it?

There is a lot of evidence that increasing law enforcement supervision at street blocks reduces crime without moving the problem somewhere else. However, it is important when youth are involved that people who are not connected to law enforcement provide supervision too, such as teachers, parents and social workers who can engage young people on the block. Mentoring, which includes programs like Big Brothers, Big Sisters and other one-on-one approaches, is an evidence-based approach that can reduce delinquency among youth who are at risk or already involved in crime. The evidence for programs that keep youth off the streets is less strong, but it shows they can be effective when they involve structured activities that focus on strengthening the young person's ties to the community and building his/her social skills, such as service learning and working with community institutions like museums, libraries, and community centers. However, simply keeping youth off the streets is not enough to reduce crime. Some programs that involve the police in a positive, non-arrest role, like youth academies and police explorer initiatives, can also provide structured activity and social development while enhancing mutual trust and respect between young people and police officers. Programs and opportunities for structured socializing should be made available during the highest-risk times for youth offending and victimization (usually in the hours after school, but your specific hot spot may be different).

2. CHANGE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

What does this mean?

Preventing crime at small places like street blocks is key to crime prevention. Instead of focusing on individual behavior, environmental approaches are about changing how a place looks and feels to encourage people to look out for each other and behave positively. Some features of places can encourage crime. For example, bad street lighting or dark alleys provide places for offenders to hide and prevent other people from seeing and intervening if someone is in trouble. Trash, run-down buildings and graffiti can show that nobody cares about or is watching over a place, which can attract more problems. Even the way that places are designed can lead to negative behavior. For example, if a bar has an outdoor patio but there is no clear boundary showing where it ends, drinkers can spill out onto the streets.

Why is it important?

Evidence shows that small amounts of disorder on a block, such as neglect, graffiti, trash, or discarded needles, can lead to more serious crime if it is not dealt with. This is known as the "broken windows" theory. If problems are not fixed quickly it can suggest to offenders that there is no ownership or pride at a place and that local people tolerate crime. Offenders may think they can get away with crime at a run-down place because residents don't care enough or are afraid to call the police or intervene. Signs of physical disorder and poor design, like dark spaces, can cause residents and visitors to feel uncomfortable and fearful in their community. However, focusing on places can be an economical way to tackle crime because places don't move so they are easier to find and treat than people. Focusing on the place rather than the offender also avoids singling out specific people or arresting youth.

How do we do it?

Environmental approaches cover a wide range of interventions including improving street lighting, increased code enforcement, cleaning up trash and vacant lots, fixing run-down buildings, "designing out crime" through architectural and open space changes, putting up fences, and other Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approaches. City agencies like the Departments of Neighborhoods, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development, and Public Utilities may be able to assist with implementing ideas. While the existing evidence on these approaches has not always been of good quality, research suggests that focusing on changing the environment at places, especially in ways that involve multiple agencies and community members working together, is a very promising strategy.

3. CHANGE POLICIES AND RULES
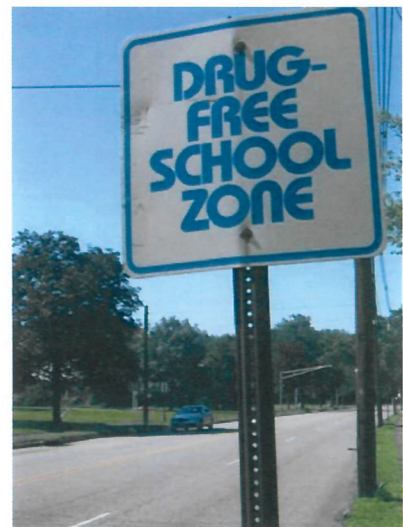
What does this mean?

Changing policies and rules is another example of an environmental strategy, as described in Section 2, but instead of changing how places look and feel it focuses on changing civil regulations and laws to encourage people to behave positively and contribute to safety in the community, or hold people accountable who contribute to crime and disorder by breaking rules. For example, a liquor store clerk or owner who does not consistently check the age of young customers and sells to minors might contribute to crime problems by allowing young people to get drunk and end up in fights. A property owner who neglects his or her building or fails to remove graffiti can contribute to the "broken windows" problem described in Section 2. Cities usually have ways to hold these people responsible for their actions and persuade them to comply with the rules, but they are not always enforced unless local people complain. At your hot spot you might find that a certain behavior is not regulated but contributes to crime; for example, young people gather in a certain place to smoke cigarettes and commit crimes while they are there. Community members can discourage these gatherings by submitting a proposal for a smoking ban in certain locations. Another example might be youth getting into trouble for not paying fares on public transit. Communities could work with transit authorities and school districts to extend the number of school students who are eligible for free or reduced passes.

Why is it important?

It can be hard to change the behavior of an individual person. We hope that when we tell our children not to drink alcohol or take drugs that they will listen to us, but we can't control the pressures they face when they are out on their own. However, if we ensure that individuals who are in charge of selling alcohol or dispensing regulated drugs or medicines stick to rules and regulations, such as not serving minors, we can reduce the risk that young people will be able to access harmful items. If we ensure that those rules and regulations are consistently enforced and people found to be breaking them are held responsible, other sellers should comply because they see that it is not worth it to break the rules. It is always better to have a system in place to stop a young person from drinking in the first place, rather than dealing with the consequences of addiction or alcohol-related crime. Research shows that focusing on enforcing civil rules and encouraging community members to work together with different government agencies and regulators to encourage compliance and report problems can have a positive effect on reducing crime overall.

How do we do it?

Community members can work with city agencies like the Departments of Neighborhoods, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development, Public Utilities, and Economic Development to explore the policies that already exist and get help with lobbying for new policies. Some examples include restricting alcohol advertising or number of alcohol/marijuana outlets within a certain area; undercover checks; training for alcohol, tobacco and drug sellers; transit passes for school students; restricting movement of students in and out of the school campus during school hours; creating a "drug-free school zone," tobacco or alcohol-free zones, and so on.

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How do we do it?

Community members can work with city agencies like the Departments of Neighbourhood, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Housing and Development, Health, Utilities, and Economic Development to explore and enact changes which add spirit and enforcing not new policies. Some examples include restricting alcohol advertising or sales of alcohol-containing products within certain hours, developer streets, mailing for student reduction and drug testing. Local police for control neighbourhoods crime and disorder problems such as starting a neighbourhood watch or the school crossing includes, and stricter weapons control.

4. IT TAKES A VILLAGE

What does this mean?

How likely are you to borrow a tool from your neighbor? Intervene if your neighbor's child is in trouble? Take it in turns with your neighbors to supervise each other's kids when they are playing outside? Participate in civic activities? When neighbors get to know each other and are willing to work together to improve their community, it creates a positive effect called "collective efficacy." This is the idea that "it takes a village to raise a child." Collective efficacy is the opposite of the problems we looked at in Section 2. When a block has high collective efficacy neighbors are more likely to get involved early when problems start so that they don't get worse.

Why is it important?

Research shows that blocks with high collective efficacy tend to have lower crime rates over time and are unlikely to become crime hot spots. These places are the opposite of the types of places described in Section 2—disorder is reduced because residents care enough to pick up trash, clean graffiti, and take pride in property ownership and public spaces. Also, when people look out for each other they create "informal social control"—this is similar to the idea of informal rules described in Section 1. When children know, trust, and respect their family members, neighbors, and members of a larger community, they have an incentive not to let those people down and a 'village' of people to help them succeed. A sense of community creates the ties that bind people—especially young people—to positive influences like families, schools and places of worship. These ideas have been found to protect young people from falling into a life of crime, or to help them turn their lives around if they do start down the wrong path.

How do we do it?

Participating in *Rainier Beach: A Beautiful Safe Place for Youth* is a great start! This project is a way for the community to work together toward a common goal of preventing youth victimization and crime. Any effort to strengthen community building, engage local people, and encourage people to take ownership and responsibility for their environment and their youth can help to create collective efficacy. Take ownership of your block by organizing or participating in Neighborhood Watch programs, initiatives to clean up trash and graffiti, and civic affairs like local business organizations or government initiatives. You don't even have to focus on crime and disorder to create the 'village.' Street parties, community events, public art tours and so on are all ways to get to know each other, build positive relationships, and show pride in the local area.

SUMMARY OF NON-ARREST APPROACHES

	What does this mean?	Why is it important?	How do we do it?
Increase supervision and provide structure	Youth tend to commit crime in company of friends and absence of people who are good influences, and when they are bored and lack structure	Supervision and providing activities removes opportunities for crime and connects youth to positive influences in their community	Mentoring Big Brothers Big Sisters Sports and recreation Street outreach
Change the physical environment	Certain features of places and environments can increase (or decrease) the risk that victimization and crime will occur there	Places that appear neglected, run down or have no sense of ownership attract more crime and disorder. Taking ownership and improving a place can deter future problems	Graffiti and trash removal Code enforcement CPTED Street lighting
Change policies and rules	People or businesses who contribute to crime problems in the community (such as selling alcohol to minors) are held responsible or encouraged to comply with rules	It is easier to encourage compliance and enforce rules that apply to everyone than expect individual people to change their behaviors	Restricting alcohol sales or advertising Smoking bans Drug-free school zones Free transit passes Closed campuses
"It takes a village"	The willingness of residents on a block to come together for the common good	People who know and look out for one another are more likely to intervene early if things go wrong. Blocks with high collective efficacy are less likely to be crime hot spots	Neighborhood Watch Events, activities, block parties Graffiti/trash clean-up Public art