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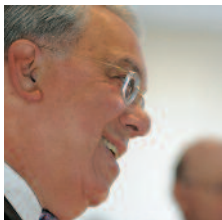
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Manny Allen, a Dropout Specialist for the Boston Private Industry Council, was one of nine panelists at an *Understanding Boston* forum on reducing youth violence in Boston's neighborhoods. The dropout program has helped some 700 young people re-enroll in the Boston Public Schools. Inset: James Fox, a national expert on violence and juvenile crime, was the keynote speaker.

Building a Culture of Peace StreetSafe Boston

Paul S. Grogan, President and CEO of the Boston Foundation, welcomed city leaders, youth workers, young people and parents to a provocative forum at the Boston Foundation on April 23rd. The topic was the intractable challenge of youth violence—and an ambitious public-private partnership called StreetSafe Boston.

"This is not only something that we *can* do," said Mr. Grogan. "This is something that we *must* do. The toxicity of fear and

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Talia Rivera works with gangs to redirect their energy in a positive direction.

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uncertainty that is damaging the lives of our young people is simply intolerable.” He went on to introduce the forum’s key speaker, Northeastern University’s James Alan Fox, Ph.D., a national expert on violence and juvenile crime.

“This is a tale of two communities,” said Mr. Fox, “one that is prosperous, safe and largely white—and another that is poor, crime-ridden and mostly black.” In fact, according to Mr. Fox, there has been a sharp increase in violence by and against African Americans, especially young males across the country. From 2002 to 2007, the number of homicides involving black male juveniles as victims rose 43 percent and as perpetrators jumped 47 percent. The trend is reflected locally as well. “In Boston, it’s not as bad as it was in 1990,” he explained, “but it’s a lot worse than it was in 2000, with a 16% increase in homicides from 2000 to 2007.” He added, “80% of those homicides involved guns. And teens and triggers are a deadly combination.”

Mr. Fox pointed out that gangs also have made a comeback since the issue was addressed during the “Boston Miracle” of the 1990s. “This shouldn’t be surprising,” he suggested. “Gangs have a number of positive functions, offering status, a sense of belonging, profit and excitement. We need to find other ways of fulfilling those needs. We have bailouts for banks; now we need bailouts for at-risk youth. We pay for programs now, or we pray for victims later.”

The first of two panel discussions following Mr. Fox’s presentation included those who work directly with Boston’s youth. Chris Byner, who grew up in Roxbury’s Orchard Park, and oversees the City’s Streetworker Initiative, said that most of the youth he works with are good people. “As a streetworker, you have to get to know them,” he said, “get inside their head, have ‘intentional’ conversations with them about their lives.”

Paul Joyce, a Boston Police Superintendent, said that the problem is too big for police alone. “We learned tough lessons in the ‘90s,” he said. “We made arrests and took guns off the street, but ultimately we were only able to make a real difference through partnerships like StreetSafe Boston.”

Echoing Mr. Fox’s comments about the positive attributes of gangs, Talia Rivera, who directs Villages Without Walls, spoke about her work with gang members. “We’ve had some success with gang truces,” she said, “getting rivals to sit in the same room and come to an agreement. But you can’t ask them to put down their guns and not give them something to pick up. It just doesn’t work.”

Another panelist, Manny Allen, a dropout recovery specialist for the Boston Private Industry Council, has helped 700 young people re-enroll in school—a crucial effort when paired with the statistic that 70% of young people who engage in violence are dropouts. “A lot of students choose the street because they know what rewards they can get,” he said, “it’s familiar territory. But the rewards school and career offer are not as clear to them.”



Boston Police Department Superintendent Paul Joyce said that the “Boston Miracle” of the 1990s, was successful because of partnerships like StreetSafe Boston.



Chris Byner manages the Streetworker Program for the City of Boston.

Paul Grogan, far right, facilitated both panel discussions. The second panel discussed the StreetSafe Boston initiative. From left: Vanessa Calderon Rosado, Robert Dunford, Rev. Jeffrey Brown, Barbara Ferrer and Robert Lewis Jr.



The second panel focused on the StreetSafe Boston initiative, which will add 25 streetworkers to five Boston neighborhoods plagued by violent crime, and offer wraparound services for youth. Robert Lewis Jr., Vice President for Program at the Boston Foundation and the architect of the initiative, described the multi-year initiative, which has the goal of dramatically reducing youth violence in those neighborhoods.

“It’s important for people to know that StreetSafe is not just about streetworkers,” he said. “It’s also about providing programming and services for proven at-risk youth across a whole range of areas.”

Barbara Ferrer offered her view as Executive Director of Boston Public Health Commission. “These are our children,” she said, “and they lead complicated lives with many different problems that need to be solved—from mental health issues to problems at home. The organizers of StreetSafe Boston understand that and have listened to the needs of the community.”

Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, CEO of Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción, emphasized the need for holistic services. “It is very important to have a seamless flow of services that address all of the needs of young people,” she said. The South End/Lower Roxbury area is one of the neighborhoods focused on by the initiative.

Rev. Jeffrey Brown, who is a co-founder of Boston TenPoint Coalition, described his experiences interviewing applicants for the streetworker positions for the initiative. “We are seeing top-of-the-line, committed individuals who are determined to achieve the goals we’ve set out,” he said. “What we are really seeking here is a shift from a culture that is used to coping with violence toward one that is based on peace.”

The Boston Police Department was represented by Superintendent-in-Chief Robert P. Dunford, who encouraged everyone involved in StreetSafe Boston to “build a foundation of trust, hold people accountable, and be flexible.” He added, “I believe this is the most exciting thing I’ve seen in 39 years on the police force. This has potential to bring peace to our neighborhoods.”



James Fox and Boston City Councilor Maureen Feeney listen to the second panel, which focused on the StreetSafe Boston initiative.



Robert Lewis Jr., the Foundation’s Vice President for Program, is the architect of StreetSafe Boston.