

Notes from Stakeholder Meeting on Violence Prevention & Trauma

Date: Thursday, 9/23

Time: 12-1:30pm

Location: Vine St BCYF Center

Attendees: Several City of Boston program leaders and various other stakeholders from community-based organizations

Meeting Purpose:

The City convened a focus group of stakeholders who work with vulnerable populations to discuss how we can support transformative efforts (through ARPA and beyond) to curb violence in our neighborhoods and provide healing and opportunity to those who need it most. The focus group included representation from City programs like the Neighborhood Trauma Team (NTT), Youth Options Unlimited (YOU), Street Outreach, Advocacy and Response (SOAR) along with program partners like InnerCity Weightlifting, Boston Medical Center, Boston Uncornered, We Are Better Together and several others. Collectively the group highlighted the need for innovative and targeted support that includes direct assistance and housing, capacity building and expansion for our most successful programs, and infrastructure for strategic coordination on prevention work.

Themes from Meeting Notes:

Targeted Supports

We need to provide targeted support to the individuals most vulnerable to the impact of community violence and trauma. We heard ideas to target assistance to Boston's most proven at-risk men, including gang leaders and neighborhood influencers. This was also expressed with the idea of a "Universal Basic Income" pilot for the most vulnerable youth at-risk. How might we target direct cash assistance and transformative supports to the 500 most vulnerable men in Boston? Would a Universal Basic Income pilot program for this group make a difference in breaking the cycle of violence that many fall into? Studies have shown a positive impact, and shaping a targeted program for Boston's needs would be a possible next step.

In addition to financial support, immediate and long-term housing & mental health supports are needed for victims of violence, both right after incidents and in the long-run to help them rebuild their lives. The wait times for people to see a therapist or psychiatrist are too long for those who need them most. In all cases, there was an emphasis on taking a tiered approach that targets impact to the most vulnerable individuals by some clearly

defined criteria.

Capacity-building

We should consider increasing the capacity of our most effective programs and non-profit partnerships. One idea is to increase the capacity of the City's Neighborhood Trauma Teams (NTT) and other City programs. In the case of NTT, this would allow them to expand their minimum response threshold to include non-fatal incidents and injuries (as opposed to only fatal incidents) that would help the City connect with and support at-risk individuals.

Several regulatory changes in City programs and grants would allow for the meaningful expansion of services. The City should consider expanding the age ranges of those we serve through City grants & programs since the average age of those involved in violence has trended upwards over the past several years. Flexibility in our grant funding for food would enable some of our partner organizations to meet youth where they are and be more flexible with how they support their well-being.

Coordination

Coordination among City and external partners needs to be reinforced and expanded, with the City taking a leadership role to convene our key partners regarding strategic issues on a regular basis. While coordination after violent incidents has been well-organized, coordination beforehand for violence prevention can improve. The City was recommended to conduct an updated needs assessment of the Violence Prevention and Intervention continuum of services within Boston, where our programs and our partners fall on the map and where the gaps persist.

Other Meeting Notes:

- As we learn to live with COVID, we can't forget about continuing to fund COVID testing & prevention in our local communities
- On wealth-building, someone in Boston can work full-time but still live in poverty. How might we design programs with a tiered approach for those who are still working and poor?
- In the long-run, hotels for survivors of violence are not the ideal approach, we should also consider helping people first and last month deposits for relocation and new housing
- There are some great examples of programs that provided housing support along with workforce opportunities, formerly under the Deval Patrick Administration

- Immediate short-term housing for victims of violence is very important, and sometimes efforts are duplicated in this work
- Funding technology needs for those who have been previously incarcerated would go a long way
- For those with mental health needs, the wait time to see a clinician is too long
- With regards to Neighborhood Trauma Team (NTT) services, the criteria for incidents that we respond to might be too high, and we should think about expanding them.
- Central part of our conversation needs to be how we help people build or rebuild their families? Families are too broken across the board
- Adopting a holistic approach when it comes to Violence Prevention is highly needed
- The City can do a better job of building connectivity between organizations
- Groups of internal and external stakeholders need to be convened more often
- The City can also help organizations build capacity and map out the entire continuum of services provided across the city
- Many of our community violence workers are not paid enough to afford living in Boston
- The 17-24 year old age bracket restrictions can be restrictive since the numbers don't reflect that anyone and we're seeing older people, on average, involved in violence
- We really need to focus on the gang leaders/influencers
- How about Universal Basic Income (UBI) for gangbangers? Discussion around that and estimated costs for most troubled youth
- There are concerns with the distribution of grant funding based on existing relationships and not to people and organizations who are directly working with gang-involved youth
- Smaller organizations that do Violence Prevention and Intervention work need grant application assistance
- It would be helpful to do an assessment of existing grant funding to better understand internal vs external gaps in our funding programs
- When doing assessments, some of which have already happened, we need community-based partners to be honest with the City on the actual scope of their services and what is happening on the ground
- Baseline screening and evaluation of community-based organizations would be helpful
- How might we build on the little successes that occur within and outside the City? We need to celebrate the wins that we do achieve