



Youth Violence in Boston 2007: Summary of Findings

By Gaby Morales

Being lulled to sleep by the vociferous blaring of sirens and the undistinguishable blows of gunfire, a somewhat of a “ghetto lullaby”, as 18-year-old Tamisha Jackson describes it, is the experience of youth growing up in various crime-plagued sectors of Metro-Boston including: East Boston, Codman Square, Dorchester, Mattapan, South End, Theatre District, Boston Common. Despite the exorbitant rise of nation-wide crime, however, current Boston Police Department statistics from January 2006 to September 2007 reveal Boston to be an optimistic exception to the United State’s otherwise perturbing upward trend of violent crimes. From January of 2006 to October 8 of this year, there has been a +/- 335 decrease in criminal activity meaning: homicide, rape and attempted, aggravated assault, burglary and attempted, larceny and attempted, and vehicle theft and attempted. Although the decline in the city has not been a particularly drastic one, it is in fact note-worthy; to thereby assess what in the crime-prevention system is working and what is not.

According to Police Commissioner Edward Davis, The Hub’s reduction of crime on the streets can be attributed largely to the hike in police visibility that has been implemented in crime-infested neighborhoods, as well as the city’s avid efforts in increasing programs for youth during after-school hours. Boston has become reputable for its initiatives in crime containment, prevention and research. Its success has particularly been attributed to the partnerships that the community and its stakeholders, law enforcement officials, parents, teachers, secular and religious organizations of Metro-Boston have vowed to take a proactive and collaborative approach in combating the city’s crime by pooling the city’s resources towards the one viable, crime-preventing unanimous effort. By thus bridging such informational gaps between the city’s resources outlets youth can have more attainable access and know what’s out there for them and how they can go about taking advantage of them.

The need for partnerships within the community has been something that first became evident in the 60’s when crime was at an all-time high, which was also when Boston first began employing preemptive action that focused specifically on youth and their affair with crime. Since then state officials have invested in creating more jobs, programs and recreational activities for young people, particularly during the after-school hours, which according to a research brief conducted by fightcrime.org, entitled: *Caught in the Crossfire: Investing in Kids*, 3pm to 6pm tends to be the prime-time for juvenile delinquency to take place. Currently, on May 10, 2007, Governor Deval Patrick has revealed a \$15 million anti-crime grant-plan to be put into place that would target youth violence and fund the training and hiring of more police officers:

The Shannon grants, administered by the Executive Office of Public Safety, are to be awarded to communities based on risk assessments that took into account the city or town’s violent and property crime rates, the percentage of population between the ages of 15 and 19 and the number of young homicide victims. The grants cover a range of proven crime-fighting activities including but not limited to increased surveillance and patrolling of hot spots, youth outreach and mentoring, after-school programs, tutoring, drug treatment, job training and placement, GED programs and community-wide anti-gang meetings.

However, although the official stats reveal a decrease in crime rates in Metro-Boston, Bostonians residing in such neighborhoods plagued by crime and delinquency say that still they do not feel any safer. The Globe reports on such findings and gathers the reaction of local residents, generally the response is the same: “I don’t think its true...I’m always afraid...I’m driving and I’m always afraid that someone is going to shoot through my window and I’m going to die”, says a 25 year old woman from Dorchester, in an interview with The Boston Globe on



August 1, 2007. The author of the findings points out that “even more than the statistics, it is the tone of the killings”—Making residents feel safe in their vicinities, lowering crime to the point where the statistical figures coincide with the perception of its inhabitants, is imperative for the decrease in crime to truly be regarded as successful milestone.

A few key factors have distinguished Boston from other cities in addressing crime, or at least some seem things to be working well—Neighborhood commitment to youth, for example—Mentors and dedicated individuals who are passionate about investing in the flourishing of high-risk and almost-at-risk youth. Also organizations such as Artists for Humanity, for example, are exemplary initiatives, whose mission is to take a proactive approach to combat street violence through artistic expression, inspires “undeserved youth” how to use various art mediums and then how to market and sell their work, which ultimately provide invaluable how to be self-sufficient and. The strength in programs such as this is that they seem to empower youth by teaching skills and them a voice to thus project such messages through positive means rather than through violence.