

NATIONAL FORUM on YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION



FORWARD TOGETHER

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PROMOTING SUCCESS THROUGH PREVENTION: MEMPHIS'S EARLY SUCCESS COALITION by Martha Yeide



At the recent implementation science training held in Washington, D.C., I had the chance to sit with the Memphis, Tenn., team and hear about some of the exciting ways the city is working to fulfill the goals of the Forum. Our conversation focused on some of the Representatives from the U.S.

Attorney's Office, Boston and Suffolk County law enforcement, and Boston Centers for Youth & Families came together during Youth Violence prevention work the team is engaged in, specifically on the efforts of the Early Success Coalition (or ESC). The ESC has been tasked with helping carry out the prevention work envisioned in Memphis's Operation Safe Community, the city's comprehensive public safety plan.

Michelle Fowlkes (pictured at right, below), executive director of the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission, reflected that the prevention component of the plan is often more difficult to support and implement than, say, suppression efforts, because the community cannot see immediate results. And yet, she continued, prevention is the key to changing neighborhoods and making cities safer. By capturing and supporting youths at very young ages, the city improves its chances of making a greater dent in crime over time. Fowlkes noted how these efforts are part of a larger national movement to focus on prevention and to improve the well-being of youths before they get involved in the juvenile justice pipeline.



Keisha Walker (pictured, this paragraph), administrator of the Office of Early Childhood and Youth in the Shelby County Government, and Sandra Allen (pictured in the following paragraph), director of the Center for Children and Parents, Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, serve as co-chairs of the ESC. They explained that the coalition, launched in 2009, has three stated goals: improving healthy birth outcomes, reducing child abuse and neglect, and increasing school readiness. The Coalition was asked to begin work in Memphis's Frayser neighborhood, because Frayser was a community that had not only multiple risk factors but also assets in place that could be leveraged. ESC's early efforts focused on providing prenatal care and home visitation programs. Over time, though, it has expanded to include



other kinds of programs and services, such as working with youths with developmental issues and connecting families to support services such as financial aid. The coalition has also organized professional development to support the organization's three goals. For instance, to support the goal of reducing child abuse and neglect, they have arranged for free training for providers who want to

introduce parenting education to their clients. Thus far, through this one effort, they've trained more than a hundred parent educators. To support school readiness, the group has worked with childcare centers to introduce developmental assessments and to provide information on how to refer identified youths and families to needed services.

It became clear, as Allen and Walker described the multifaceted efforts of the ESC, that collaboration is the key to getting this work done. As Allen commented: "We take what is happening and leverage it with each other. Don't duplicate, but leverage." This approach explains how the more than 65 partners of the coalition come together to make things happen. They collaborate through workgroups on issues that are related to their core missions.



Sometimes, Allen noted, it's better to join with a partner that has already fielded an initiative than to form a new workgroup. Thus, when the coalition wanted to address infant mortality, it was able to identify an initiative already under way that was supported by the health department. The goal of the core leadership team is to determine how best to leverage resources and coordinate work.

The success of this collaborative approach has led to work on a "no wrong door" approach. The members of the coalition realized they could not staff a "one-stop shop," where clients could find all the services they needed. Instead, they've cultivated a network so that, no matter which door is accessed by a youth or family, the client can be directed to additional or better suited services. To facilitate this approach, the group developed a toolkit for making referrals among ESC partners and other agencies in the community (the toolkit can be downloaded).

Allen acknowledged the challenges of a collaborative approach, which cannot succeed without ongoing communication and relationship building. "And it's tough to keep up with what everyone is doing!" she said. The Early Success Coalition is interested in tracking outcomes for both its evidence-based home visitation programs and other efforts. Allen talked about a new shared database, Shelby Connect, which will greatly help the partners share data and track outcomes. There were the usual security and data sharing issues that had to be addressed to get the database up and running, but some agencies have already started entering data. A variety of information will be entered, such as the data generated by the home visitation programs (e.g., services being delivered to children; mothers employment/school status), scores related to school readiness, data on infant mortality, and such. The database will allow partners in the network to gather some basic information about what other services a client may be accessing to better address its needs. The work sounds exciting, complicated, and maybe sometimes overwhelming. But both Allen and Walker agreed that the work is so much easier because, as Walker commented, "We like each other; our strengths complement each other." They both emphasized the importance of having public and private entities working together to address youth violence and well-being. And it's clear that the Early Success Coalition benefits from its synergistic energy and efforts.