

# **Hopeful Diversions:**

Youth Intervention Programs and their Potential for Preventing

Delinquency and Crime

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## **Introduction**

After completing my sophomore year of college, I spent much the following summer wandering the streets of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in our nation's capital. Schools were closed and hanging out on the streets seemed to be a common activity for many of the youngsters living in these neighborhoods. I spent my summer on these streets because I learned that it was the best way to locate many of my young indigent clients and witnesses, which was a major part of my job as an Intern Investigator for the Public Defender Service of D.C. (PDS). I worked hard to protect the rights of my clients and to ensure their fair treatment by the justice system; however, I regretted that my services did little to address the root of the problem. I wondered if the lack of adult supervision and organized activities for disadvantaged youths had anything to do with the prevalence of juvenile crime in these neighborhoods. It seemed to me like more could be done earlier in the process to prevent the onset of delinquency rather than just the symptoms of it.

Crime has long been a major concern in America and has become one of the leading social problems (Rubin, 1999). Despite the overall decreases in crime seen over that last 15 years, the number of young adults (18 to 24 years) in jail has been growing (Delgado, 2001) and homicide has become the leading cause of death for young African American males (Greenwood et al. 1998). These trends bring greater credence to the concerns expressed by Reverend Jesse Jackson at the 2008 Washington and Lee Mock Convention, who regretted that too many young black males are either in prison or deceased and too few are in college. Furthermore, estimates from the Justice Department predict that the number of young adults incarcerated by 2010 will be double the 1995 figure (Delgado, 2001). As juvenile delinquency continues to increasingly

afflict the lives of so many American youth, there is certainly good reason for the public to be concerned.

Given the seriousness of the problem, it is surprising that most of the money and effort devoted to addressing it has been restricted to a narrow range of remedies with much of the attention on the incarceration of persons who have already committed crimes. Significantly less consideration has been given to diverting individuals from committing crimes in the first place. This paper initially examines some of the theories on the causes of crime, and why U.S. crime tends to be most prevalent in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (Reid, 2003). Then I attempt to determine whether some alternative crime remedies would be effective in high-risk communities. My research question seeks to explore the effects of three types social interventions directed toward high-risk youths: early childhood development programs, formal after-school programs, and community recreation centers. I review important findings from previous literature and provide case studies of specific intervention programs which are already publicly implemented and can be replicated and expanded to other locations. Crime in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods is a complex phenomenon that stems from many conditions, including economic, psychological, and environmental factors, which are often interrelated in these communities. Social intervention programs for at-risk youth that are designed to divert some of the risk-factors (discussed in the following section) for crime may have the potential to significantly reduce delinquency and crime. This paper strives to shed more light on this connection and its findings may inspire further research and better public policies.

### **Theoretical Background for Research Question**

Before evaluating youth intervention programs, it is helpful to understand why such programs might have a role in crime prevention. This section discusses the theoretical

explanations for the causes crime, which represent the underlying basis for my hypotheses on effective crime prevention and interest in evaluating youth intervention programs.

In response to crime, most government policies have focused on retributive measures such as increasing the probability of getting arrested and the length of incarceration. These measures seem limited, for they mainly address the economic incentives for crime. In a study on city size and crime, Glaeser and Sacerdote (1999) discover that the higher financial rewards of crime found in large cities only explain one-quarter of the connection between city size and crime rates. They also find that the lower probability of recognition and arrest, common features of urban life, merely account for one-fifth of this connection. These findings indicate that there must be other significant forces besides direct economic incentives that lead people, especially those concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Reid, 2003), to commit crimes.

Research has demonstrated that the early development of an individual plays a major role in whether that individual becomes a criminal. A recent article in the New York Times titled “Poverty is Poison” discusses scientific findings that “many children growing up in very poor families with low social status experience unhealthy levels of stress hormones, which impair neural development” (Krugman 2008). Other studies have also found (Greenwood, 1999; Bernazanni et al., 2001) that conduct problems in early childhood often lead to delinquency, and later to criminal activity. Criminologist Peter Greenwood claims that “troublesome and delinquent children are more likely to come from troubled families and neighborhoods” (Greenwood, 1999). He lists the several birth related factors that have been found to be associated with higher rates of delinquency: teenage pregnancy, substance use during pregnancy, low birthweight and other types of birth complications. Family background and the home situation also play an important role, as studies find that parental criminal records, parental

mental health problems, poor parental supervision, erratic childbearing behavior, parental disharmony, and rejection of the child are associated with higher probability that the child will become delinquent (Greenwood, 1999). These risk factors are more likely to be found among those raised in impoverished urban communities (Greenwood, 1999). Therefore, I believe that more early intervention programs providing parent-child services for at-risk households should help reduce crime.

There are also theories pointing to the environmental effects of living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Many researchers believe that certain characteristics of these deprived neighborhoods pull people into a life of crime. For instance, violence and gang membership are prevalent in these neighborhoods. Such an environment can encourage violent behavior and other illegal activities. Sociologists Krivo and Peterson (1996) contend that “within the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, residents are socialized to engage in criminal activity through modeling the actions of others” (3). Residents of these neighborhoods frequently witness criminal activity and often feel the necessity to adapt to this environment by becoming, or appearing to be, more violent in order to protect their lives and property. Krivo and Peterson also demonstrate that as more people begin to take defensive or threatening postures and behaviors, such as carrying weapons, the level of violence escalates and the number of people that rely upon violence for defensive purposes increases.

Krivo and Peterson’s (1996) theory also includes the hypothesis that impoverished urban neighborhoods suffer from a lack positive role models. They find that high crime neighborhoods have fewer “old heads,” that provide anti-trouble, anti-crime lessons; and those that remain no longer have prestige or credibility as role models (4). The scarcity of positive role models in disadvantaged neighborhoods is depicted in Adrian LeBlanc’s revealing nonfiction narrative on

life in the South Bronx, *Random Family*. Her account shows how successful drug dealers often served as role models for the community, for they were seen as celebrities and were treated like “king[s]” (20). It should not be surprising that crime is prevalent in communities where drug dealers are the ones being looked up to by younger generations. People tend to model their values and goals in life according to the society around them. LeBlanc illustrates how living in a disadvantaged community influences personal attitude. She writes, South Bronx residents “measured improvement in microscopic increments of better-than-whatever-was-worse...Heroin was bad, but crack was worse. A girl who had four kids by two boys was better than a girl who had four by three. A boy who dealt drugs and helped his mom and kids was better than a boy who was greedy and spent the income on himself” (32). In communities where positive role models are scarce and where the line between what is right and wrong is blurred, it can be especially difficult for young people to avoid falling into criminal activity.

The connection between drug use and crime deserves particular attention, for drugs tend to be an unfortunate characteristic of disadvantaged neighborhoods and seem to play a major role in crime outcomes. From my own experience as an intern for the Public Defenders Service, I learned more about the significance of the connection between drug use and criminal activity. I remember one PDS attorney explaining how drug use was perhaps the biggest risk-factor faced by her clients. The majority of her clients were drug users and many of the crimes they committed were influenced by drug addictions. She also believed that the high rates of recidivism among her clients were mainly caused by their inability to overcome drug addictions. The literature surveyed by neuropsychiatry professors, Anglin and Maugh II (1992), reveals that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by drug dependent offenders. They claim that as levels of personal use increases, the frequency and severity of criminal behavior also rise

dramatically. Furthermore, they find that relatively few severe-level drug users are responsible for an extraordinary proportion of crime. Anglin and Maugh's research also supports my attorney's theory on recidivism: they find that those who are involved in regular use of hard drugs or the use of multiple substances are at higher risk of recidivism after their release from incarceration. It is also telling that economist Steven Levitt (2004) attributes one of the main causes of decreasing crime rates in 1990s to the decline of the crack epidemic.

There certainly seems to be an important relationship between drug use, which tends to be higher in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (Delgado 2001), and criminal activity. Early intervention programs, which improve childhood development and provide a healthier foundation to grow from, should help reduce the chances for drug use later in life. Furthermore, I believe that school-age programs (formal after-school and community recreational centers), which provide positive role models, foster enriching activities, and administer a safe, non-threatening environment, can also play a significant role in discouraging drug use and diverting many other risk factors from occurring in the first place, thereby reducing the likelihood for delinquency and crime. The next section will look at the different types of youth interventions and uses specific case studies to examine their preventative potential.

## **Investigation and Evaluation of Youth Intervention Programs**

### **Early Childhood Interventions**

Many of the risk factors associated with childhood behavioral problems and future delinquency stem from disadvantages in early development. Given the influence of early development on future delinquency, it follows that intervention programs must try to reach at-risk individuals as early in their lives as possible to stand a greater chance in curtailing them from criminal activity. Therefore, I begin my evaluation of intervention programs by looking at

the effects of parent-child services, which are early childhood approaches targeted toward at-risk families.

Most of the evaluative research on early intervention methods for reducing delinquency and crime comes from small-scale experimental programs. Greenwood (1999) discusses the effects of programs that provide home visits and enriched preschool services for children of high-risk families and reveals that several of these programs have been effective in reducing delinquency and crime. The Syracuse University Family Development Research Program recruited 108 deprived families to participate in the experimental intervention, which began during the third trimester of pregnancy. The major focus of the program was to support parent strategies that enhanced the development of the child through weekly home visits and day care through the first five years of the child's life. A ten-year follow up of this program found 6 percent of the program children had been referred to probation, compared with 22 percent of the matched controls (Greenwood, 1999). Moreover, among those with probation records, the program children committed significantly less severe offenses and had substantially less frequent contact with the juvenile authorities (Donahue and Siegelman, 1998). Another long-term experiment, the Perry Preschool Project provided two years of enriched preschool and weekly home visits for disadvantaged children ages 3 to 4 (with 58 children assigned to program group and 65 in the control group). Researchers collected follow-up data annually when the children were between the ages of 3 and 11 and then at age 14, 15, 19, and 27. Greenwood (1999) reports that program subjects had accumulated only half the arrests compared to the matched comparison group up through age 27. Furthermore, overall arrests were fewer: 1.3 per person for the experimental group and 2.3 for the controls.

Early intervention programs such as Syracuse and Perry are important because not only do they help mitigate the early developmental causes of criminal activity but they can also prevent some of the other crime-causing factors from kicking in. For instance, early intervention programs can lead to increases in attendance and performance in school. Early follow-ups of the Perry project certainly showed such results, finding that children in the program were more motivated in school, achieved better grades, and were more likely to be employed at age nineteen (Greenwood 1999). These school-based results can help decrease negative environmental effects, decrease the likelihood of drug use, and increase legitimate work opportunities later in life. Later follow-ups also found that Perry participants were more likely to have completed high school, to have higher earnings, and to own homes and a second car (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1995). Better outcomes in school and in the job market can provide strong disincentives for crime. Results from experiments like the Syracuse and Perry programs firmly support the connection between early intervention programs and reduced probability of delinquency and criminal activity.

However, results from these studies are somewhat limited in their ability to predict whether early intervention initiatives would significantly prevent crime. Syracuse, Perry, and most other studies of the long-term effects of early childhood interventions are of demonstration programs designed for research purposes. Evidence from larger-scale, public programs would prove more convincing in promoting policy initiatives.

The Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program in Chicago is a good example of a large-scale, publicly funded, early intervention program and serves as an effective case study for determining long-term effects and future policy initiatives. Created in 1967, the CPC is a center-based intervention, providing comprehensive educational services and family-support to economically

and socially disadvantaged families. Chicago public schools currently operate twenty-four CPCs, which are located in or near low income elementary schools. Twenty of these programs have services from preschool to third grade while four have services only in preschool and first and second grades. CPCs are unique in that they provide up to six years of intervention services from ages 3 to 9 with half-day preschool, a half-day or all-day kindergarten, and an all-day service in the primary grades. Programs like Head Start are primarily preschool programs. The rationale behind CPCs is that by providing a stable learning environment with small class sizes and fostering constructive parental involvement during the preschool and primary-grade years, crucial years in the development of an individual, positive scholastic and social outcomes will follow. To service children who are most in need (and those who are the most at-risk for educational failure and delinquency), the centers reach out to and are located among the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Chicago.

Parental involvement is the underpinning of the program. Each parent is required to spend at least a half-day per week in the center during preschool and kindergarten. This involvement can be in the form of serving as a classroom aide, accompanying field trips, utilizing the parent-resource room, participating in reading groups with other parents, or taking trips to the library with teachers or children. The centers also sponsor continuing education courses for parents. The emphasis CPCs put on healthy parental involvement seems to acknowledge the risk factors in early development that may come from the family background and home situation of disadvantaged families.

Data gathered by the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS) helps to evaluate the effectiveness of these CPCs in preventing delinquency. The study tracks the well-being of a cohort of 1539 low-income minority children born in 1980 who attended early childhood

programs. A 15-year follow-up was then conducted, providing a long-term study of program effects. The sample included the entire cohort of 989 children who attended the 20 Child-Parent Centers in preschool and kindergarten in 1985-1986 and 550 (control) children of the same age who participated in an alternative all-day kindergarten program in 5 different Chicago public schools in similar neighborhoods. These schools were randomly selected from 27 sites participating in the Chicago Effective Schools Project and matched the poverty characteristics of the CPCs. Also, like CPC participants, the children were eligible for and participated in government-funded programs. The control children had no systematic intervention experiences from preschool to third grade, although some enrolled in Head Start.

The CLS study appears to have been designed well enough to avoid selection bias. Given parent involvement requirement of the CPC programs there is the potential for a selection bias in enrollment. Many of the parents who chose to enroll their children in CPCs might also be more likely than parents of those not enrolled to play an active role in their child's development. The existence of this selection bias during initial enrollment would weaken the validity of the study's results. However, background data from the study indicates that most children in the preschool and elementary school comparison groups did not enroll in CPCs because they simply did not live in the attendance area (Reynolds et al., 2001). All the families involved in the study lived in similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods with comparable levels of risk factors and some just happened not to have a CPC program nearby. Therefore, nonparticipation was due to home residency rather a lack of parental interest and involvement.

Follow-up data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study indicates that CPCs have had significant long-term effects on preschool entrants (Reynolds et al., 2001). Individuals who participated in the preschool portion of the program had a third fewer arrests of any kind (16.9%

vs. 25.1%) and 40% fewer arrests for violent offenses (9.0% vs. 15.3%) than individuals in the comparison group by the time they were 18 years old. There was an additional 25% reduction in arrests for violent offenses for those who continued on in the program through elementary school. Preschool participants also had a lower rate of multiple arrests (9.5% vs. 12.8%). However, unlike those who entered in preschool, elementary school entrants (entering in either first, second, or third grade) were not associated with lower arrest rates or with fewer arrests for any measure (Reynolds et al., 2001). These results suggest that intervention at an early age was crucial and that continued participation increases the program's preventative potential.

Despite lack of significant preventative outcomes for youth who entered CPCs in elementary school, the results are still consistent with the previous finding from the Perry Preschool Project and the Syracuse University Family Development Research Program. Both Perry Preschool and Syracuse University demonstrated long-term preventative outcomes for their participants, who received the interventions during their pre-school years. The CPCs also show these results for their preschool entrants. These findings support literature which stresses the strong effect that risk-factors may have during the *early* years of a child's life. It seems very possible that preschool CPC entrants may have benefited more than later entrants because their intervention was early and during more formative years for development. Evaluation of the CPC program in Chicago study is further evidence that early child development programs that start when the child is 4-years-old or younger are effective in preventing future delinquency. The study also demonstrates that these effects can be realized by widely implemented and publicly funded programs.

### **Formal After-School Programs**

There is certainly strong evidence that reaching an individual during the early stages of childhood establishes a stronger foundation for preventing future delinquency and criminal activity. However, participants in early childhood programs are still more likely to become delinquent than children nationally (Reynolds et al., 2001). Graduates of these programs will most likely continue to face the many risk factors that come with living in a disadvantaged home and neighborhood. Perhaps there is a role for intervention programs that seek to serve disadvantaged school-aged youths. It is during these years that many disadvantaged youths begin to fall into delinquent behavior. At-risk communities could especially benefit from organized activities for school-aged youths, as they may provide further developmental benefits, positive role models, and safe recreation during out-of-school time.

Statistics indicate that unorganized or unsupervised out-of-school time can be problematic in disadvantaged communities. The “America After 3PM” survey (2003) found that more than 14 million K-12 youth (25 percent) in the United States are responsible for taking care of themselves. The survey also finds that 34 percent of all 6 to 8 graders and 52 percent of 9 to 12 graders are left unsupervised after-school. Self-care can have detrimental effects on any child and is especially of concern for disadvantaged youth. Studies show that both boys and girls from low-income families display more antisocial behaviors when they are left in self-care after school as compared to children cared for by their parents or other adults (Vandell and Shumow 1999). Not to mention, as Seppanen (1993) points out, these studies do not even begin to account for all the potential developmental and enrichment opportunities that are lost during self-care. It is also important to note, as the “Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report” finds, that juveniles commit many offenses at different times than adults, and the juvenile patterns vary on school and nonschool days. For instance, violent crimes by juveniles peak between 3pm and

4pm (the hour at the end of the school day) and the generally decline hour by hour until the low point at 6am. The report also compares the school- and nonschool-day violent crime patterns and finds that the 3pm peak occurs only on school days and only for juveniles. The statistics and findings on self-care and juvenile crime rates seem to indicate that there is a need and preventative role for organized out-of-school activities, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods. A major provider of these activities could be the schools themselves by means of formal after-school programs.

A look at the literature on formal after-school programs reveals some evaluative studies on outcomes for at-risk youth. Posner and Vandell (1994) find that after-school programs are one way to alleviate some of the negative effects of urban poverty on children. Their study shows that for low-income children, these programs are associated with better grades and conduct in school in addition to better peer relations and emotional adjustment. Looking more specifically at the After-School Time Study program in Boston, Vandell and Shumow (1999) report that low income children who attended these programs had fewer behavior problems than low income children in other care arrangements. These results support the evidence that self-care is most problematic for children in low-income families and in disadvantaged neighborhoods, as the programs are apparently most beneficial for the same children. Formal after-school programs can occupy youngsters with alternative activities as well as provide a safe haven within neighborhoods suffering from high crime rates and harmful influences.

Given these optimistic findings on their preventative potential, can we expect that implementation of large-scale, publicly funded programs for formal (school-based) after-school programs will significantly reduce delinquency and crime among youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods? A long term evaluation of an existing city-wide formal after-school initiative can

bring us closer to answering this question. Relative to other states, California has led the way in creating and supporting publicly-funded formal after-school programs for at-risk youth. One of the prominent models for the State's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program was the Los Angeles' Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (LA's BEST), which serves as a good example of a city-wide after-school initiative intended to curb the prevalence of delinquent behavior. A great deal can be learned from a closer look at the implementation of LA's BEST and its effects on participating youth.

LA's BEST has been in operation since 1988 and now serves 180 elementary schools and over 26,000 students. The program strives to provide safe and supervised after-school enrichment and recreation to at-risk youth in Los Angeles between the ages of 5 and 12. Participating students are offered homework assistance, library activities, field trips, performing and creative arts projects, as well as other recreational activities. The (school) sites are selected based on educational needs, low economic status of the community, and high gang and crime rates in the neighborhood.

There has been very limited research on the long-term effectiveness of after-school programs in lowering rates of juvenile crime and delinquency. However, the data gathered on the LA BEST programs by National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) at the University of California, Los Angeles helps to partially fill this void. The study addressed eight years of data, using a sample of more than 6,000 students. It compared the juvenile crime records of 2,331 students participating in the LA's BEST program to 2,331 students in schools served by LA's BEST but not enrolled in the after-school program, and 1,914 students at schools with like demographics but which did not have the LA's BEST program on-site. Risk factors such as gender, race, language proficiency, and social economic status were

controlled using student background information. Furthermore, LA's BEST schools demonstrated similar trends as control schools in both total crimes and severe crimes; implying that observed differences in effects would not be due to LA's BEST selecting schools with less crime to receive the program. The initial data in the CRESST study was collected for students starting the 1994-95 school year and the outcome data was gathered through 2006.

The CRESST study's initial statistical analysis showed some unexpected results regarding the program's effect on official juvenile arrests. The analysis (Goldschmidt et al., 2007) found proportions of juveniles arrested in each of the groups were nearly identical (between 7.7% to 7.9%). This is counterintuitive to the hypothesis that groups involved in the after-school program, which serves to mitigate many risk factors for delinquency and crime, should have fewer arrests than the groups not involved in the program. However, survival analysis, charting the likelihood that a student will maintain crime-free behavior, demonstrates results more consistent with expectations. When duration (number of years of LA's BEST enrollment) and engagement (average number of days per week of actual attendance) are taken into consideration, the after-school program significantly improves juvenile crime survival probabilities. The study finds that students who are actively (at least 10 days per month) and intensely engaged in the program benefit most from LA's BEST, and that even those who are moderately engaged also benefit. For instance, by 2005, approximately 87.5% of the control group members and low-engagement LA's BEST participants had avoided juvenile crime records. In contrast, 91.4% of medium-engagement and 93.1% of high-engagement LA's BEST students avoided juvenile crime records (Goldschmidt et al., 2007).

The study's inclusion of participation levels in the analysis of outcomes seems to be an appropriate adjustment. It makes sense that simply being enrolled in an after-school program may

not show significant effects on juvenile arrest rates. It would be rather difficult for after-school participants who only attend sporadically and are not very engaged to experience the preventative benefits of these programs. Therefore, it is not too surprising that *overall* analysis of the results shows no significant differences between program participants (many of which may have only had sporadic attendance) and the comparison group. On the other hand, it is also important to note that the inclusion of participation levels in the analysis may lead to a selection bias that can weaken the findings. Even if the findings are consistent with the theory that participation in LA BEST programs improved attitudes and behavior, they may also be consistent with the hypothesis that more motivated youth participated more. Consequently, the effects of some missing variables which may be connected with participation level (such as motivation or parental support) on the resulting outcomes cannot be completely ruled out. Though it still seems more likely that actual program effects have more to do with why program participants have more preventative outcomes than any influence of selection bias.

### **Community Recreational Centers**

The evaluation of LA BEST after-school programs also revealed that all the youth tracked in study demonstrated an increasing probability of committing a crime from elementary through early high school, followed by a decrease into adulthood (Goldschmidt et al., 2007). They were most likely to commit a crime when in grades 9, 10, and 11 (between the ages 14 and 17). These are perhaps the years when the influences and temptations that lead to delinquency are the strongest. As discussed above, LA BEST only serves students between ages 5 and 12 and a nation-wide survey from the United States Conference of Mayors (2003) reports that most formal after-school programs serve only elementary and middle-school students. Given the

preventative philosophy behind many after-school programs, it seems counterintuitive that the age group most at-risk for juvenile crime is also the most underserved by the programs.

However, simply extending the age eligibility for formal after-school may not necessarily resolve this issue, for there is no guarantee that high-schoolers will actually attend. It is more difficult to reach older youth with after-school programs, as they tend to be drawn to more independent, unsupervised activities (Sipe and Ma, 1998). Therefore, there is also the concern that the youth who would most benefit (the most at-risk for delinquency and criminal activity) are less likely to be attracted and willing to attend these programs. Furthermore, it is questionable how effective formal after-school programs can be in serving at-risk older youths, many of whom may not have benefited from earlier interventions and who might have already fallen into delinquent behavior. Another general shortcoming of most formal after-school programs is that these programs are closed when the school is out, like during holiday breaks and the summer. The limitations of most formal after-school programs bring me to my last category of intervention programs: community recreational centers. Organizations independent from public schools, and which provide a center for out-of-school activities within at-risk communities, might be able to fill some of the gaps left by formal after-school programs. This section will evaluate the outreach and preventative potential of community recreational centers by examining centers initiated by the Boys and Girls Clubs Of America (BGCA).

BGCA, established in 1906, is national nonprofit youth organization with over 1,450 affiliated clubs nationwide with location in all 50 states. Several characteristics of the BGCA organization indicate their awareness of the root causes of crime and allow their clubs to be a good case study of preventative recreational centers. The clubs strive to be “The Positive Place For Kids” and to mitigate the harmful outcomes that can result from self-care (BGCA website,

2008). Every Boys & Girls Club is an actual neighborhood-based building designed solely for youth programs and activities. The Clubs strive to meet the interests and needs of young people ages 6-18 and are open every day, after school, on weekends, and during the summer. Every center has full-time, trained youth development professionals, serving as positive role models and mentors as well as supplementary support from volunteer workers. The Clubs reach out to disadvantaged youth who cannot afford or may lack access to other community programs. They can vary in the type and range of youth development programs and services, which are determined by local need and available resources. The BGCA organization has a long history of involvement in youth development and anti-crime guidance, and is therefore a valuable example for assessing the preventative potential of community recreational centers.

Evaluation literature for Boys and Girls Clubs and other recreational centers is rather scarce; however, the available research has shown some hopeful findings regarding delinquency and crime prevention. The Boys & Girls Club recreation and drug prevention program was effective in two studies conducted in a series of public housing projects. In a Columbia University study, five housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs were compared to five receiving new clubs. Initially, levels of drug activity and vandalism were the same; however, by the time the study ended, the housing projects without the programs had 50 percent more vandalism and 30 percent more drug activity (Schinke et al., 1992). This study replicated the findings of a similar 1956 study involving the Red Shield Boys Club in Louisville, Kentucky. Data from two years before the club opened in 1946 up until June of 1955 showed that juvenile delinquency dropped 52% in the neighborhood, at a time when delinquency was nearly tripling in one comparison neighborhood and going up 33% in another similar neighborhood (Brown, 1956). Studies also indicate that local community recreation centers not affiliated with BDCA

can also produce preventative outcomes. The Bayview Safe Haven in San Francisco, which reaches out to young people already involved in the juvenile justice system or those at risk of becoming involved, has been shown to play a significant role in the reduction of crime in the area. An independent evaluation study (La France et al., 2001) found that for students with prior histories of arrest, those who did not participate in the program were twice as likely to be arrested during the six-month initial “intervention” period as program participants (43.8% vs. 19.8%). For students with no prior histories of arrest, those who did not participate in the program were three times more likely to be arrested during that same six-month initial intervention period than program participants (36% vs. 12.1%). These results support the hypothesis that community recreation centers can play a significant role in reaching out to older, more at risk youth (who are often underserved by formal after-school) and in reducing their likelihood for criminal activity.

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These previous studies of Boys and Girls Clubs demonstrate that the Clubs can be a preventative intervention for the disadvantaged youth and communities they serve. However, these evaluations did not involve youth who were not already BGCA members. Therefore, even though the youth served by the Clubs and their programs in previous evaluations definitely had risk factors, the majority had found their way to the Clubs on their own. Perhaps a more compelling argument for the preventative role of recreational centers could come from an evaluation of Boys and Girls Clubs that serve a population similar to the kind the Bayview Safe Haven targets.

BGCA has, in fact, initiated clubs that focus on targeted outreach in the form of two anti-gang programs. There are several Boys and Girls Clubs that administer the Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach program (GPTTO) which is designed to help youth stay out of the

gangs. There are also clubs that run the Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO) program intended to help already delinquent youth get away from their gang-associated behaviors and values. The GPTTO and GITTO programs recruit certain youngsters specifically because they have been observed to face risk factors (even more than other BGCA members) associated with gang involvement and a gang lifestyle. The programs hope to serve as diversions from gang membership and criminal activity, as they provide participating youths (ages 6 to 18) with supportive adults, challenging activities, and a place to belong. An evaluative case study of such Boys and Girls Clubs would provide a large-scale assessment of recreational centers (unlike the Bayview evaluation) that specifically focuses on those higher-risk youth who are more likely to shun involvement in any kind of after-school activities.

A multi-city study conducted by Public/Private Ventures (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002), a nonprofit research organization, has gathered useful data for an evaluation of the preventative potential of Boys and Girls Clubs administering GPTTO and GITTO. The study included 21 Boys and Girls Clubs that used the prevention approach and 3 Clubs that used the intervention approach (with 932 prevention youths and 104 intervention youths). All of the prevention Clubs began using Gang GPTTO either simultaneous with the start of the evaluation or 1 year beforehand. The intervention Clubs developed their GITTO projects between 1 and 3 years before the start of the evaluation. To understand whether changes in youth behaviors over the course of one year could be attributed to GPTTO and GITTO, the study also included comparison groups of youth who were not enrolled in the Clubs. The comparison group youth were selected to have demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) similar to those of the GPTTO and GITTO youth and were recruited from the same or similar neighborhoods. The

youth questionnaire used to assess outcomes in the 12-month follow-up study was determined in consultation with researchers who have studied gangs and delinquency.

This first important finding of this study is that both the GPTTO and GITTO programs succeeded in reaching the high-risk population of youth typically underserved by out-of school programs (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002). The study reports that prevention Clubs drew in a significant number of new youth who were at high risk of gang involvement based on indicators such as their level of association with negative peers, poor academic histories, and prior involvement in illegal and delinquent activities. Intervention Clubs were also successful in attracting new youth, a majority of whom were already gang members or were demonstrating gang behaviors. The P/PV study compared risk factors of both prevention and intervention youth to other national studies of youth and found that the Clubs are reaching youth with considerable needs. These youth are also older, on average, than are the typical BGCA or youth organization participants (48 percent of prevention and 96 percent of intervention youth are ages 13 or older in comparison with 30 percent of the club population that were not involved in the two programs). Through utilization of staff time outside of the club for direct outreach and by building a network of referral agencies, both GPTTO and GITTO are attracting youth who may not have made it to the Club by themselves. It is also important to note that a majority of youth (73 percent and 68 percent for prevention and intervention youth, respectively) reported they were still attending the Clubs one year after they were initially recruited. In addition, participation rates were high, as 50 percent of prevention and 21 percent of intervention youth surveyed reported having been to the Clubs several times per week in the month prior to the follow-up interview (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002). Given the difficulties in attracting participation in out-of-school programs among older and higher-risk youth (or any youth or teen

for that matter), these levels of retention and participation indicate that recreational programs like GPTTO and GITTO can reach their targeted population.

However, practitioners and policy-makers are ultimately concerned about whether the programs actually make a difference in the lives of the youth they serve. Initial analysis of the data (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002) found significant differences between program participants and comparison groups only for school and relationship measures. This initial analysis examined the average effect on participants, regardless of how much they participated in the programs. As with the evaluation of the LA BEST programs, additional significant outcomes are revealed when frequency and length of participation is factored in to the analysis. The results of a second set of examinations (which took into account the level of youth involvement over the course of the year) show that more involvement in the Clubs is associated several encouraging outcomes for both GPTTO and GITTO youth (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002). In regard to indicators of juvenile delinquency, the study found that more frequent GPTTO Club attendance is associated with delayed onset of one gang behavior (less likely to start wearing gang colors), with less contact with the juvenile justice system (less likely to be sent away by the court) and with fewer delinquent behaviors (stealing less, and less likely to start smoking marijuana). More frequent attendance among GITTO youth is associated with disengagement from gang-associated behaviors and peers (less stealing with gang members, wearing gang colors, flashing gang signals, hanging out at the same place as gang members, being a victim of a gang attack, and having fewer delinquent peers) and with less contact with the juvenile justice system (lower incidences of being sent away by the court).

Like with the LA BEST after-school programs, the findings regarding level of participation in the Clubs and preventive outcomes may be influenced by selection bias. Again,

the effect this bias may have had in the outcomes is not likely to be as explanatory as active attendance and participation in the programs. Furthermore, the youth who experienced preventative outcomes were still either at very high risk for delinquency or already involved in criminal activity. These findings are impressive and powerful regardless of whether there might have been selection bias. This case study of anti-gang focused Boys and Girls Clubs reveals that youth interventions not only help prevent the initiation of delinquency but also help already delinquent youths change their behavior. It is evident that community recreational centers can make a significant difference with youth they keep in attendance; even with older, higher-risk youth.

### **Implications**

Early childhood programs show the strongest evaluative results and potential for preventing delinquency and crime. These programs were less susceptible to selection-bias and participants who received *early* intervention (all Perry and Syracuse participants, and the preschool CPC entrants) consistently showed better outcomes throughout the evaluations.

Intervention during the preschool years seems to be crucial for at-risk youth, as it addresses perhaps the most formative years of life and can prevent the onset of additional risk-factors that often make later preventative interventions more difficult. The case study of CPCs in Chicago helps demonstrate that effective early childhood programs can be publicly administered and implemented on a wide scale.

Those opposed to implementing these programs will likely point out the high costs of providing every at-risk child access to them. It is true that wide-scale implementation will not be cheap; however, it is way too soon to write off early childhood programs as unaffordable. Creative implementation, like using public school facilities (as some CPCs do), can help cut

costs. Also, once the programs establish themselves they will likely gain support from additional public and private funders and will be able to recruit volunteer workers. Given the promise of these programs, an attempt at more wide-scale implementation is necessary before we can claim an understanding of their affordability. However, what we do know from experience is that retributive anticrime efforts have been very expensive and their cost-effectiveness is questionable (Reynolds, 2001). In a recent presentation to the Good Venture project at JP Morgan (2008), a student research group from Washington and Lee University calculated a cost of \$100,000 per year for keeping a juvenile at a detention center in Virginia. This figure only represents detainment costs and would be much higher if police and legal costs were factored. It is evident that we are already paying a substantial financial price for crime and perhaps it is time to divert more public funds toward prevention.

Greenwood's (1999) careful cost-benefit estimations of early childhood programs indicate that the social and economic benefits of such programs would substantially exceed their costs. Furthermore, he finds that the early childhood programs for at-risk youth "may be several times more cost-effective in reducing serious crime than long mandatory sentences for repeat offenders" and that "a large share of the cost of some early-intervention alternatives may be offset by long-term reductions in prison costs" (pg 40). Greenwood's estimations are supported by similar predictions of cost-efficiency specifically looking at the Perry Preschool Project (Barnett, 1993; Donahue, 1998; Grunewald, 2003) and the Child-Parent Centers in Chicago (Reynolds, 2001). These estimations are further indication that early childhood programs for at-risk youth would be a worthy public investment.

There are still some initial concerns that come up regarding implementation of early childhood programs. Even if these programs prove very cost efficient, this efficiency will be seen

only in the long run. The crime prevention benefits will most likely not be seen until the participating youths reach adolescence or even adulthood. The time-lag for beneficial outcomes (and savings) can make these programs, which have high initial costs, difficult to support politically. Retributive measures for reducing crime have been politically viable partly because their deterrent effects are realized immediately. It is important, therefore, to stress to the public and other funders the great social and economic benefits of allowing these early childhood programs to have their effect and also the consequences of not giving such promising interventions a chance. Another potential concern is how effectively early intervention programs can target at-risk individuals. When the targets of the program are only infants and preschool-age children, it can be difficult to distinguish exactly which youth are at-risk. During these younger ages, children are not likely to show signs of behavioral problems that could clearly imply risk for delinquency. Therefore, early childhood development practitioners need to pay very special attention to family background characteristics and the home situation when targeting participants. Even with perfect information on every family and their risk factors, it is impossible to predict criminality with certainty. However, the literature on major risk-factors provides valuable clues and should be used as a guide in the targeting process. With effective targeting and implementation, early childhood programs should be able to fulfill their promise.

For school-age youth, formal after-school programs and community recreational centers demonstrate consistent preventative outcomes for youth who actively participate in these programs. While self-selection bias may have influenced the evaluation results of LA BEST and the Boys and Girls Club programs, it seems much more likely that youth who actively participate in these programs have significantly better outcomes because of their participation than due to the selection bias. At the very least, the preventative potential of formal after-school programs

and community recreational centers deserve further research. Given the importance of active participation, future research should pay particular attention to how effectively programs engage and retain participants, especially those youth who need the interventions the most.

The findings on their preventative potential are also promising enough to suggest that more public funds should be allocated to out-of-school programs like LA BEST and the Boys and Girls Club. Using the findings in the LA Best evaluation, the CREEST study estimates that every dollar invested in the after-school program results in a savings in juvenile crime costs of approximately \$2.50 (Goldschmidt et al., 2007). It is also apparent that the implementation costs of both the gang prevention and intervention programs administered by the Boys and Girls Club are minimal in relation to the amount society spends on gang suppression and incarceration (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002). Considering that these programs target youth either on the verge of delinquency or those who already have criminal histories, the benefits could be realized immediately.

The observations in this paper also suggests that the three types of youth interventions discussed are not mutually exclusive and may actually complement each other, as each program addresses a different age group with different risk-factors. It also seems possible that an earlier intervention can increase the chances that an individual will initially enroll in later intervention and the chances that he benefits from it. For instance, an early childhood program can increase personal motivation and family supports, which could then encourage attendance and active participation in an after-school program. This paper is unique in presenting a side by side evaluation of three different types of youth interventions. This approach has allowed us to see how the interventions might overlap each other in servicing different groups of at-risk youth and build upon each other, as transition through the programs may possibly result in added benefit.

Further research and data collection on youth who transition through two or all three of these interventions would be instructive. Individual findings from all three case studies already suggest that longer involvement in each type of intervention program increases the probability that the program will be a preventative diversion. Additional investigation may find that public implementation and wide-scale availability of all three interventions assures longer *total* participation in youth interventions and the strongest likelihood of preventative outcomes for at-risk youth.

### **Conclusion**

A roof leak is not fixed by simply placing a bucket under it. The bucket will temporarily control the situation by catching and containing the leaking water. However, no matter how many buckets are brought in, the leaking will continue and probably cause greater damage to the roof and the entire building. The problem will persist until measures are taken to actually repair the roof and safeguard it from incurring future leaks. The recent responses to crime and juvenile delinquency in the United States have mostly been retributive measures. Even though some of these measures (increases in criminal penalties and police presence) have shown some success in reducing crime rates (Levitt, 2004), they are all after-the-fact and fail to address many of the root causes of the problem. Furthermore, “tough on crime” measures are costly to administer and have been found to be less cost-effective than some intervention programs (Greenwood, 1999). More importantly their retributive nature is dangerous, for they do little to *prevent* the development of the criminal and are applied after the crime (and the damage) has already occurred. It follows that much more attention should be paid to finding ways to divert people from becoming criminals in the first place. Evaluations of early childhood interventions, after-school programs, and community recreational centers demonstrate that youth intervention

programs are promising social investments for crime prevention. We cannot afford to ignore these hopeful findings. Instead, we must recognize their implications and allocate much more research and public policy into youth intervention programs. We must find a way to give at-risk kids a better chance at a more hopeful future.

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