History
The Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (ACEs) Program was established in 2000 by the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Each ACE partners with a high-risk community to mobilize residents and researchers to work together to develop effective youth violence prevention strategies tailored to their specific community. The ACEs seek to prevent youth violence by mobilizing community members and agencies to implement evidence-based programs and practices, and evaluating the impact of those approaches on youth violence and related outcomes in a defined community. The ACEs are required to collaborate with local health departments to build the local public health infrastructure and capacity for youth violence prevention efforts.

Steps to Success is a collaborative project between faculty researchers from the University of Colorado (CU) at Boulder and the CU School of Medicine/Children’s Hospital, as well as community organizations and residents in the Montbello and Northeast Park Hill Communities, the Lowry Family Center, the Foundation for Educational Excellence, the Denver Crime Control and Prevention Commission, Denver Police Department, and the Denver Safe City Office. In 2011, the Steps to Success project was established in far northeast Denver with the mission of implementing and evaluating a multi-faceted approach to reduce youth violence and promote positive youth development in the community of Montbello. The project also aims to train future researchers in the area of youth violence prevention and is supported by the City of Denver Mayor’s Office, the Colorado Department of Education, Denver Public Schools, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Community Characteristics
Steps to Success is a community-wide effort being implemented in the Montbello neighborhood in far northeast Denver. Montbello is approximately 4.5 square miles with a population just above 30,000. According to the 2010 census, 37% of the population is under the age of 18. Through much of its 50-year existence, Montbello has been characterized by a majority of African American residents, but recently has changed to become predominantly Hispanic. Approximately 59% of the population is Hispanic, 28% African American, and 8% white. The Piton Foundation reports that there are more vulnerable children in Montbello than in any other neighborhood in Denver, and the number continues to grow at a faster rate than other Denver neighborhoods. Montbello schools report an average of 90% participation in the free and reduced lunch program, and Montbello has been hit particularly hard by the foreclosure crisis. Despite the neighborhood’s population size and need, it is served by a small handful of nonprofits and has only one full-service grocery store. Montbello is geographically isolated from much of the rest of metro Denver, so transportation and scarcity of services are significant obstacles for the many low-income residents. The overall crime rate in Montbello is 5.3 per 100 people based on data from 2009, and the violent crime rate for youth aged 11 to 24 is 2.6 per 100 youth.

Collaborations
CU researchers have established partnerships with state, city, and local organizations in an effort to successfully collect data and implement and evaluate multi-faceted youth violence prevention strategies.
in Montbello. Partnerships have been integral in garnering community support for the Steps to Success project and the implementation of evidence-based youth violence prevention strategies. In Montbello, two boards have been established to steer the project in accordance with the Communities That Care system (described below) and include a Community Board and a Key Leader Advisory Board that make data-driven decisions about how to best prevent youth violence in Montbello. They also play an important role in leveraging additional resources to support the community action plan they have developed and to ensure selected tested and effective programs and strategies are embedded into community delivery systems through both governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Prevention Strategies

A modified version of the Communities That Care (CTC) system is being implemented and evaluated in Montbello. CTC is a strategic planning system that begins with identifying risk and protective factors associated with violence and other problem behaviors and then implementing evidence-based strategies to address these factors. Successfully carrying out the five-phase approach of the CTC system involves several key components, including the collection of comprehensive data from local schools and a community survey and the involvement of the Community and Key Leader Advisory Boards, which make data-driven decisions regarding risk and protective factors that should be addressed in an effort to prevent violence and other problem behaviors. The traditional CTC system is being adapted in such a way that the Community Board is provided with a “menu” of evidence-based programs that can be implemented to address the prioritized community risk and protective factors related to violence. The menu of programs includes those that are related to violence prevention, such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Strengthening Families 10-14, Life Skills Training, Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy. In the final phase, a community action plan is developed and the evidence-based programs approved by the Community Board are implemented.

Evaluation Methods

In order to evaluate the impact of the prevention programs selected through the CTC process, CU researchers are collecting data on youth violence and other risk and protective factors over the course of the five year Steps to Success project. This includes conducting a community survey in both the intervention and comparison communities to assess initial levels of community characteristics and conditions, risk and protective factors, and successive changes in rates of violent and other problem behavior among youth aged 10-17. Additionally, summary data from school-administered student surveys will be available to the Steps to Success Community and Key Leader Boards providing information about school climate, the prevalence and frequency of participation in violent behaviors, gang-related behaviors, and risk and protective factors before, and after the implementation of the selected prevention strategies.

Researchers will monitor program implementation using a two-pronged approach. They will evaluate how well the intervention community is able to implement the CTC system by assessing whether the community achieves the milestones and benchmarks set forth by the system. Effectiveness of the violence prevention programs chosen for implementation will be evaluated by comparing behavioral outcomes in the Montbello community against those in the comparison site, Northeast Park Hill, an area near Montbello with similar demographics and crime statistics. The overall crime rate per 100 people in Northeast Park Hill is 7.11, and the violent crime rate for youth aged 11 to 24 is 1.5 per 100 youth based on 2009 data.

A process evaluation at the program level will also be conducted to assess the fidelity of implementation to the interventions chosen by the Montbello community.

Impact

Properly implementing evidence-based programs that address Montbello’s prioritized risk and protective factors is expected to reduce youth violence and other problem behaviors. As a result of this project, Montbello is expected to achieve a reduction in the overall levels of violence for youth ages 10-17. The project expects to match or better the 10% reductions in the rates of violent behavior called for in the objectives of the national Healthy People 2020 Framework for the Violence Prevention Leading Health Indicators.

For more information, please contact:

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